Teenage Survival Guide

Dee Snider
Philip Bashe

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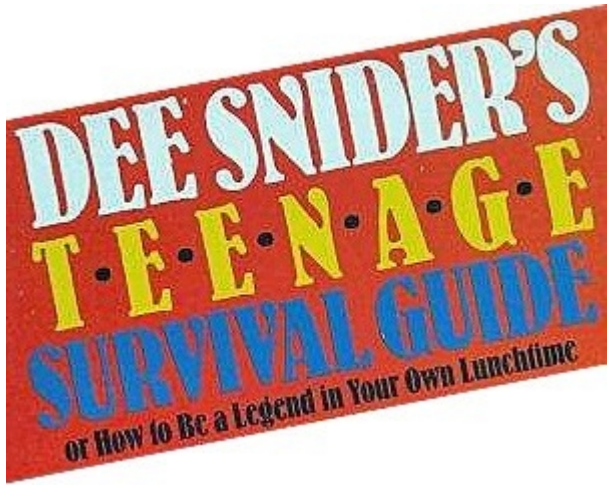

DEE SNIDER'S
Teenage Survival Guide

Dee Snider and Philip Bashe

A DOLPHIN BOOK
Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York

I dedicate this book to my son Jesse and my wife Suzette. Thanks for never once questioning my dream and for standing by me throughout it all. I love you.
Dee Snider

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Snider, Dee. Dee Snider's teenage survival guide.

"A Dolphin book." Bibliography: p. Summary: Gives advice to teenagers on a variety of topics including friendship, self-esteem, parents, sex, pregnancy, and abortion. 1. Adolescence—Juvenile literature. 2. Youth—Attitudes—Juvenile literature. [1. Conduct of life] I. Bashe, Philip. II, Title. III Title: Teenage survival guide.

HQ796.S556 1987 305.2'35 88-32963
ISBN 0-385-23899-1
ISBN 0-385-23900-9 (pbk.)

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Printed In the United States of America
First Edition

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dee Snider would like to thank Stephen King; Alice Cooper, Lemmy Kilmister and Motorhead; Ozzy Osbourne; Robert Plant; Brian Johnson, Angus and Malcolm Young and Cliff Williams of AC/DC; Geezer Butler, Tony Iommi and Bill Ward of Black Sabbath; Phil Carson; Bobcat Goldthwait; Howard Stern (Go easy on me); David Letterman (You too, Dave).

Charlie Barecca; Marty Callner; Ms. Edwards; Jeanette Gargiulo; Willy Hauser; Don Mannello; Kenny Neall; Roger Offner (Godachi); Prank Schenker; Kitty Snider; my dog Bubba. pAlso: Mark Puma; Pam Rousakis; ICM; Clayton Knowles; Terri Baker; Jay Jay French, Mark Mendoza and Eddie Ojeda of Twisted Sister. Special thanks to my parents, Bob and Marge Snider, my brothers Frank, Matt, Mark and Doug; and my sister Sue.

And to all those who abused, neglected and treated me like garbage, thanks for the hang-ups. If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have been able to write this book. Then again, maybe I'd be better off.

Philip Bashe would like to thank the following people for their contributions to the creation of this book.

First, the following persons and organizations for their input and for supplying materials:

Al-Anon; Alateen; Alcoholics Anonymous; American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy; American Association of Suicidology; American Bar Association; American Council on Education; American Foundation for the Prevention of Venereal Disease, Inc.; American Humane Society; American Psychiatric Association; American Psychological Association; Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders; Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc.; Association of SexEducators, Counselors and Therapists; Birthright, Inc.; Centers for Disease Control; Child Welfare League of America, Inc.; Family Service America; Hofstra University Counseling Center; Home Run; Legal Aid Society; Medicaid; Nassau County Department of Health; National Abortion Federation; National Association of College Admissions Counseling; National Center for Health Statistics; National Council on Alcoholism; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; National Health Information Clearinghouse; National Institute on Drug Abuse; National Network of Youth and Runaway Services; National Runaway Switch-board; New York State Department of Social Services; Planned Parenthood Federation of America; Poison Control; Right to Life; Runaway Hotline; Rick Seymour of the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinics; Holly Shaw; Dr. Gaylord Shimnoski; Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Special thanks to Sarah Lazin; Stephanie franklin; and Michael Shore.

A very special thanks to Patty Romanowski Bashe for her input and invaluable insights.

Most of all, thanks to Robert M. Bashe and the late Evelyn J. Bashe, for doing it right

And thanks to Pat Boone.

We'd both like to thank our editor at Dolphin/Doubleday, Jim Fitzgerald, who conceived the project; his assistant, Casey Fuetsch; Lisa Wager; and Paul Bresnick.

Bibliography

They [adolescents] now seem to love luxury, they have bad manners and contempt for authority, they show disrespect for adults and spend their time hanging around places gossiping with one another. They ore ready to contradict their parents, monopolize the conversation and company, eat gluttonously and tyrannize their teachers...

—Socrates, circa 400 b.c.

Oh, you're so condescending, your gall is never-ending. We don't want nothin', not a thing from you. Your life is trite and jaded, boring and confiscated. If that's your best, your best won't do.

—"we're not gonna take it," twisted sister

One generation passeth away and another generation cometh . . . and there is no new thing under the sun.

—Ecclesiastes 1:9

Introduction

Thy Teendom Come

I didn't want to do this.

I mean, who am I to be writing a book for teenagers, advising them on how to get through "teens years," when my own youth could hardly be a role model and certainly not what I'd call a real good time. As a matter of fact, throughout my inglorious teens I was a nerd.

But maybe that's all the more reason for me to be writing this. We nerds can be pretty insightful when it comes to analyzing the problems of growing up because, with few friends and even fewer dates, we have so much free time to think about them. And, it seems, the bigger the nerd, the more accurate the insights. And I was one **big** nerd [mean, too).

Teenage Survival Guide is not a map that will magically lead you down the road from your teen years to adulthood. What i am offering are facts and my ideas about growing up. Although not all these situations will apply to you, I'm willing to bet that a good number of the problems i faced and feelings i had will ring true. Maybe through my experiences, you can better understand yourself and those around you. You might even come to the realization that your life as you know it can change. Look at me: avoided in junior high and high school, and today a heavy-metal rock-star celebrity and Boss-o'-Chicks, (And through it all I've remained humble, as you can tell!) Sometimes just being able to identify a problem and realizing that many kids are running into the *same* problem is step one of the solution.

Over the years I've noticed that I am obsessed with the hardships of adolescence; I write about them constantly in my songs for Twisted Sister, and now in greater detail in this book. One reason I am so attuned to and feel such a bond with teenagers is that I really felt cheated out of my own adolescence by my parents, my peers, my teachers—everybody. When I was writing "We're Not *Gonna* Take It," I tapped the anger I used to feel from constantly being stepped on. When nothing seemed to be *going right,* I'd retreat to my room and put on a record. Listening to rock & roll—real loud, or at least as loud as my parents would let me and *my $25* stereo could go—gave me temporary salvation from my insecurities and anxieties. Another song, "I'll Never Grow Up, Now," came from a bad memory of always being hounded to give up the band, get a "real" job, cut my hair and *settle* down. So I suppose that makes *Teenage Survival Guide* a part of the multivolume-set teenage rock opera I probably will never record. It may lack screaming guitars and thunderous drums, but you can understand the words. I hope.

I was a late bloomer, always adapting to trends just after they'd

gone out of style, and so even though I'm now past thirty, I still feel terminally teenage. And if it makes you feel any better, I'm just now coming to terms with and understanding some of the emotions I felt during my youth. I've often thought how much better off I might have been had I come to terms with those things earlier on, or at least understood that it would all pass. Having fulfilled my dreams of becoming a rich and famous rock & roll star and finally having reached a point where I feel good about myself, I believe I can reflect honestly on both the positive and negative parts of my "teen years" (I hate those words) and be objective. At times, painfully objective. We all need an objective outside party sometimes to help us analyze a problem more clearly. I'm sure many psychologists will give me free objective advice after they read this book.

For example, Twisted Sister always hires a producer for each album we record, because we are so close to the music it can be hard to hear what's good and what's not so good. So maybe this is my role with this book—to act as an unbiased observer. And being a parent myself—of a four-year-old son, Jesse—hopefully I can shed some light on your parents' attitudes and their frequently irrational behavior. Becoming a parent definitely helped me understand the conflicts I had with my own parents.

When I was growing up feeling confused, there were few places to turn for help. I couldn't talk to my parents, my friends or my teachers, so I received answers to some of my questions through the songs of my rock & roll heroes, like Alice Cooper and Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant. Rock & roll was my only outlet and at times my only friend. But you can get only so many answers from a three-minute song. Unless you're a Rush fan.

I remember seeing a book in my school library, *'Twixt Twelve and Twenty,* first published in 1958 and written by a squeaky-clean pop-singing idol you may have heard of: Pat Boone, Deb-by's dad. In 1987 you would title it *'Twixt Ten and Twenty,* or even *'Twixt Eight and Twenty* because kids today confront social and moral problems at an increasingly earlier age: Teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide are spiraling rapidly. Every generation likes to believe that its teen years were the most unbearable, but we all know that you guys face countless more choices and pressures than ever before. When I was in my early teens, I had little knowledge of sex and drugs but was concerned mostly with keeping my baseball glove well oiled and my record collection well stocked.

Some adults would contend that those were simpler, healthier, happier times and ways. Certainly simpler. But whatever they were, we will never go backward. For better or worse, this is the world we live in. *Teenage Survival Guide* addresses the realities and the

challenges of growing up in the 1980s: sexuality, the dangers of drugs and drink, child abuse and birth control, as well as timeless matters such as individualism, coping with peer pressure, the search for self-identity and masturbation. (Not necessarily in that order.)

Teendom Can Be Tough

Adolescence is both awesome and difficult—although the awesome part sometimes doesn't show up until you're out of your teens and have the benefit of hindsight. It's a time of unexplainable inconsistencies; Your body grows, your voice drops; you can't grow a mustache but your face has a nice crop of pimples; at about the time you finally become interested in the opposite sex, the opposite sex shows a definite lack of interest in you; your parents demand that you "be mature/' yet "don't act so smart" (whatever *that* means).

You're treated like neither a child nor an adult but somewhere in between. To paraphrase from one of my favorite songs, Alice Cooper's "I'm Eighteen," you're a boy and you're a man, or you're a girl and you're a woman (or you're a man *and* a woman. If this is the case, see the chapter Help Yourself.) Even Pat Boone griped on behalf of teenagers thirty years ago: "We feel that we're set apart, shooed off together, accused as a group." Society has always placed adolescents in limbo. As a matter of fact, the word *teenager* didn't even exist until forty-five years ago, because back in your grandparents' day, young people went directly from childhood into adulthood, usually by getting married in their mid- or late teens.

Adolescence, incidentally, comes from the Latin word *adolescere,* meaning "to grow into." (Yes, I am a fountain of knowledge.) I think this means that you are not yet the person you will be. Parents, teachers—all adults, it seems—are so busy trying to "mold" you, they neglect to see that you already have been molded to quite a degree and are an individual.

But who is that individual? Is it the awkward, shy boy or girl whose eyes still fill with tears anytime you're reprimanded by a teacher, or is it the manly or womanly person you feel like when you're with your friends? Your emotions seesaw back and forth in control, floundering, ecstatically happy, desperately sad and usually all in the course of a school day. I remember how drastic the ups and downs could be:

You walk to school, meet your friends on the way, go directly to home room and everything is cool. Your first class is English, but you breeze through it because your teacher is asleep too. You're in a good mood.

Second period. Damn. You've got gym next. This forces you to pass auto shop, where that big jerk Kawalski hangs out eight periods a day. The last time you walked by, he used your arm as a wrench "because it's Wednesday; I don't like Wednesday". Now, this little drama is going to last all of two minutes, yet you're frantic, You look

outside. It's January. It's freezing cold, there's snow on the ground. You have a choice; either take your chances slipping past auto shop, maybe trying to camouflage yourself in the jungle of students on their way to class, or risk terminal pneumonia by entering the locker room through the outdoor entrance. After all, what if Kawalski doesn't like the month of January either?

You make it to gym and after checking for signs of frostbite, you're shooting hoops, torturing yourself over what you should have done: “...taken my books and smashed him in the face. Next time for sure..."

Then, next period. Robin Titurusky sits next to you in chem lab. This babe is a stone fox. Maybe she'll even acknowledge your presence today with a smile, anything.

You're up—your best friend invited you over after school to play his newest computer game. And you're down—so-and-so down the street's parents are getting a divorce, and she may have to move out of the school district. And somebody in your gym class was in the emergency room after taking too many pills. Some of your friends don't think it was an accidental overdose, either. Then you come home, trudge through the front door, and your mother glances up from watching "Divorce Court" and asks, "What did you do in school today, dear?"

"Nuthin”

You don't tell her you nearly went out of your mind worrying that this big dumb jock was going to beat you up, because you know what Mom's reply is going to be: "Well, why don't you just tell him to leave you alone?" Or: "Well, why don't you just tell the principal?"

"Because then he gets the entire football team to kick my ass!"

So how can you talk about those bigger problems? She just doesn't seem to understand.

Your Problems Are Real

Grown-ups tend to look back on their adolescence selectively, remembering only the pleasures and overlooking the pains. They forget how devastating not having a date on a Saturday night or getting rejected by a sorority can be. What with having such adult responsibilities as meeting mortgage payments, raising a family and squirreling away money for your college education, they relegate your predicaments to secondary status. They're *teenage* problems, not real problems.

An example: My parents once bought me a pair of white buck-skin shoes—ironically, the type popularized by Pat Boone in the 1950s—and insisted I wear them to school. *Hideous* was not a strong enough adjective to describe these shoes, which resembled two white Volkswagens. Volkswagens would have been an improvement. Now, this was around 1970, a time when the student uniform was frayed blue jeans and sneakers. I had enough trouble as it was fitting in with my peers, and to wear those shoes to class would have meant eternal humiliation. Damnation. Possibly capital punishment. "Mr. Snider, you are hereby sentenced to a cruel and painful death for having committed an unpardonable fashion *faux pas..."*

Truth was, though the white bucks were definitely gross, most of my peers probably would have been too preoccupied checking their own reflections in the classroom windows to have paid much attention. They were trying to blend in with the crowd as frantically as I was. But when I looked down at my feet, I saw these two giant white flotation collars with flashing neon arrows. The others just had to notice. And if they didn't laugh outwardly, I figured, they were just being nice.

I was in tears, nearly hysterical, begging my parents not to force me to wear these shoes. You would think that because I was obviously so upset, they might have reconsidered, no matter how trivial it seemed to them. But no-ooo! First they laughed. (And made things worse by pointing out, *"Pat Boone* wears these shoes!" Aargh!) Then they yelled at me. My problem was not a "real" problem; I was being "silly."

This is how real it was to me: I earned money from mowing neighbors' lawns and delivering newspapers, went down to the local shoe store and bought a pair of happening shoes. For the next six months I left the house wearing the white bucks, took the earliest bus to school, so that it was still dark out and virtually no one was patrolling the hails, sprinted to my locker and changed into my new shoes. At the end of the day I waited until the halls were deserted,

changed back into the buckskins and took the late bus home. That's how real a problem of having to wear on ugly, unfashionable pair of shoes was to me at age fourteen. Extremely real. Seriously real. I'm talking *very* real.

And, since I never wore the white bucks, they never wore out. My parents were so impressed with the shoes' durability they planned to buy them for the entire family. Fortunately, my parents dropped the idea.

It's all relative, isn't it? There's no question that your father's getting laid off from work is a lot more serious than your not making the final cut for the tennis team. But your parents are armed with the resources and coping mechanisms that come with age and experience. In most cases they are better prepared to contend with their crises. It seems as if every problem you experience is for the first time, and you're afraid that you may not have the answer or be able to survive it.

I think you'll identify with many of my recollections here, whether you're satisfied or dissatisfied with your life so far, popular or unpopular. This isn't a book just for losers, the downtrodden, the huddled masses yearning to be free; it's for anybody who wants to gain a better understanding of himself, his parents, his friends and his future. The insights offered apply not only to your teenage life but will be just as valuable as you enter adulthood and encounter many of the same situations and characters. I don't want to depress you, but high school is forever.

You will find that work becomes the equivalent of what school was, with a boss instead of a teacher. And just as in school, you will have to cope with a similar cross section of personalities: leaders, followers, bullies, dudes and dudettes, wimps. The difference is that as an adult, you will enjoy more freedoms and, *hopefully,* possess a better understanding of who you are and what you want from life.

I've tried to keep the book's tone light because, after all, humor is the key to surviving; without it, you'll never make it. But there are subjects, such as coping with parental abuse, drugs and alcohol, sex, depression and suicidal feelings, that need some seriousness. In the final chapter, Help Yourself, we've provided the names, addresses and phone numbers of organizations and agencies that sincerely want to help you, regardless of your problems.

A thought: What happens if your parents stumble across this book while straightening up your room? For one thing, they'll probably begin keeping their bedroom door locked at night. Second, you probably receive a raise in your allowance. And they definitely won't be telling you to clean your room. Because of my rather, er, extreme appearance and my band's pretty ferocious music I can see them now,

cowering in a corner: "That Dee Snider, he's written a book against us parents. It's antiauthority." In *Teenage Survival Guide,* I am a bit tough on parents, no doubt about it. Being a father myself, I recognize the difficulties involved but still feel parents owe their children a certain amount of caring, understanding and responsible behavior. And yes, I am antiauthority, but my definition of authority is anyone or anything that restricts a person from exploring his potential, from being an individual, from enjoying himself. Those authorities can be adults, but more often than not they are people your own age.

You may want to share *Teenage Survival Guide* with your parents, to help them gain a better understanding of you and your world, which is very different from the one in which they grew up. But ultimately, this book isn't for your parental units, it's for you.

—Dee Snider, *Summer 1987*

P.S.: No need to thank me—I'm being paid.

1. YOU

The time has come for you to make a stand. You've got to do things your own way. Forget about the style, forget the brand,

'Cause every dog has his own day. It doesn't matter what the others think, What counts is, do you like you? You think you're drownin', But you'll never sink,Just do what you wanna do.

—"lookin' out for #1," Twisted Sister

1. The Good Old Days Sucked

"These are the best years of your life." How many times have you had a finger shaken in your face and heard those words, usually when you're totally depressed. It makes you think, "The best years of my life? You mean it's going to get worse?"

You know the old saying, Youth is wasted on the young? How true. Isn't it amazing that while teenagers wait impatiently to reach maturity, grown-ups gaze at their high school rings and recall wistfully the halcyon days of their youth. And the older they get, the better they remember it as being: a time of innocence and, in comparison to adulthood, with its "grown-up," "real" problems, a breeze.

"Ah, yes," they say with a sigh, "those were the good old days."

Not for me they weren't. I've never looked back fondly. Life has gotten better and better for me, and the only reason I look back at all is to learn from the past. Too much looking back prevents you from moving forward. I grew up in the heart of suburbia: Baldwin, Long Island, about a half-hour from New York City. Back then I wasn't Dee, but Daniel, Snider—a tall, overly sensitive kid who used to cry a lot, and with pretty good reason. At home I didn't get along with my parents. (And my parents didn't know it.) At school I was an outcast. I wasn't comfortable with the way I looked or the way I acted. At times I was painfully lonely. When I was in junior high school, do you know what I lived for? "Star Trek," on Friday nights. Thar right, the high point of my life was a one-hour TV show. I didn't have many friends or a girlfriend, so I'd just hang around the house on weekends, and I can remember counting down the days to "Star Trek," beginning on Mondays. Lame, huh? It gets worse: The network canceled the show.

The majority of my teenage memories are like that—pretty sad—yet no matter how trivial, incidents from my past are etched so indelibly in my mind that I can recall every minute detail as if it all happened yesterday. I guess it's because of the impact adolescence has on the rest of your life. It's a time when a lot of your attitudes, ambitions and values are shaped.

There is one incident that has stayed with me more than any other, which I'll tell you about:

It's a balmy spring day, and I'm outside playing Softball in gym class. Naturally when I come up to bat, the inflelders and the outfielders move in, and the jeering starts: "Okay, pitcha, strike this sucker out. No batta, no batta!" Now, despite my reputation as a dork, I was a good player, and *boom!* I slug the ball deep into the outfield; a no-doubt-about-it home run. I'm flying around the diamond, arms and legs pumping, when this kid named Fred—who used to torment me regularly—sticks out his foot, trips me and I go sprawling onto the blacktop playing field like an airplane making a crash landing. Everyone laughs uproariously.

I felt totally humiliated, was red with anger and vowed that no one would ever laugh at me again. Years later, when I was singiing

with Twisted Sister, if somebody in the audience heckled or booed, I'd actually stop the music and call him out from the stage: "What are you laughing at, jerk? Do you think you can do better? Would you like to come up here and try?" Sometimes I'd even dive into the crowd to find him. I can trace my burning desire to prove myself to others and to command respect back to that day on the Softball field.

I had to wait another dozen years for the funny part of the story to come, but it did: A few years ago, after Twisted Sister became internationally known, the local newspaper that I delivered as a kid put me on the cover of its Sunday magazine: area boy makes good, that sort of angle. The reporter tracked down Fred the bully, still living in town (and probably having graduated to pushing little old ladies in front of trains), and asked him about the tripping incident, which still causes the hair on the back of my neck to stand up anytime it's mentioned.

Amazingly, Fred did not remember a thing. I guess, to a bully, this was an involuntary muscle action: Someone runs past you on his way to third base, and your leg automatically shoots out and trips him. Of course he didn't remember tripping me; he tripped a whole schoolful of kids! What was so traumatic to me was unmemorable to him.

I felt victimized by others until the day I decided not to play victim anymore, and my alienation changed from passive to aggressive. This wasn't so great, either, because I became very hard and cold, walking around with a chip on my shoulder, a real rebel without a cause. Face tightened in a sneer, eyes burning. To others it looked cool, but it did not feel cool at all. I was totally paranoid, convinced others were snickering at me as I walked down the street. Nervous. My mind racing. On constant red alert. I'd growl to myself, "Over there, somebody's staring at you," fix him with a glare and snarl, "What are *you* looking at?" I was so tense all the time, after one walk around the block I'd have to return home to rest because I was so exhausted.

Standing up for myself and watching others back down taught me an invaluable lesson. For so long I'd felt powerless to improve my situation, but I began to realize I had the strength to change things. We all do.

Feeling Alone? You're Not Alone

The worst feeling of all was that I was alone in my plight. I often sought refuge in my bedroom with my Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Deep Purple records, jumping around, playing air guitar, air drums, air keyboards with an air microphone in front of the floor-length mirror. Pretty strange thing to do, air guitaring, or so I thought. Certainly no one else in the world did such a thing, and those who did were probably straightjacketed and taken away to some high-security nut house. It wasn't until much later that I learned through talking with others that the kid next door was playing air guitar, and the kid next door to him and the kid next door to him. Nearly every teenager is at times plagued by feelings of loneliness, insecurity and inferiority. Compounding your anguish is the fear that you are the only one in your class—no, in your school; no, in the entire galaxy, including the lowest forms of plant life—who feels this way. You feel isolated from others, as if you were surrounded by an

invisible shield everywhere you go. (Could it be your deodorant?) No one understands how you feel. You envy the popular girl with the pretty smile and wish you could be more like her, with no problems.

Yet even well-liked teenagers have their own self-doubts. Maybe the popular girl worries that people don't really like her for the person she is but for her pretty face alone. And within the popular clique exists a pecking order. Somebody is the most popular of the popular kids, while somebody else is the least popular and has to deal with that.

The John Hughes film *The Breakfast Club* sh owed how most young people suffer from the same anxieties and questions about who they are and who they're becoming. There was a jock (Emilio Estevez), a popular girl from a well-to-do family (Molly Ringwald). a wimp (Michael Anthony-Hall), a resident weirdo (Ally Sheedy) and a dirtbag (Judd Nel son), serving detention together on a Saturday. Each had been trying to live up to others' expectations of them and fulfilling roles that were dictated more by parents and peers than by themselves. With no other members of their peer groups around, they were forced to communicate with one another, which never would have happened had it been a regular schoolday. The result was acceptance of one another. And of themselves, at least for the time being.

You are never really alone in your problems, and if you're willing to take a risk and bring up the subject with friends, you might be surprised how receptive and relieved they are to have an opportunity to talk about it themselves. On the other hand, they might clam up. Teenagers are so anxious to fit in that they're afraid someone will consider their opinions or emotions unusual. So they usually keep such deep feelings to themselves, convinced no one could possibly understand what they are going through.

I never communicated my insecurities to anyone because I was scared of being laughed at and so I lived a lot of my life inside my head, plotting ways to be accepted. Singing in a band was one way. For a long time that was all I wanted: to fit in with everybody else. (And look at me now!) They say that youth is a time of great freedom, and it is, from certain adult responsibilities. But teenagers can be very hard on those who are different. Because they don't really know who they are at that point, they feel threatened by someone who doesn't fit in. And because they don't yet have the confidence that comes from establishing their identity, it's easier to go with the crowd. Life begins to get complicated when we see that everybody is not the same, because then people have to think for themselves. And for most of us that is a frightening prospect.

In my early teens I felt restricted from thinking, dressing and acting certain ways because I wanted to fit in. I wanted people to like me, and conformity is widely—and wrongly—thought to be the surest way to guarantee popularity. Teenage nonconformists may earn some grudging respect for their independent spirit, but it usually makes them targets for ridicule.

For instance, to be a little different, I grew a goatee. Well, kind of

a goatee; some barely visible, wispy hairs on my chin. I thought I was really happening, but it probably looked pretty lame. Naturally, to the jocks in my high school, it was something to pick on. They'd call me *goat.* "Hey, goat!" It was very funny to them, for a long time, until all of a sudden they started growing their own goatees. And I shaved—immediately. As much as I wanted to fit in with others, I was horrified by the idea that something I'd done to show my individuality had become the in thing to do. I'll tell you, it's difficult during adolescence to deal with wanting to be part of the crowd and at the same time wanting to be who you are, which often means being different.

From what I can see, the pressure to conform isn't as great today as it was when I was growing up. The music and dress of different groups of people aren't as polarized anymore, and there has been a great deal of cultural crisscrossing. It's hard to tell the headbangers from the punks, the uniforms are so interchangeable. Racial and musical barriers seem to be breaking down gradually. Ten years ago that Aerosmith, a white hard-rock band, and Run-D.M.C, a trio of black rappers, would share a stage was unthinkable.

You're lucky. I think there's more tolerance today for being what you want to be and dressing the way you want. When I was in elementary school in the 1960s, everybody listened to the same music and wore the same outfits. There were few acceptable options. I remember that back in elementary school there was a kind of jacket called a CPO—chief petty officer's coat. It looked like a shirt with tails and came in blue and maroon. Everybody had one. Except me. So what else is new? i

I dreamed of owning a jacket like that because without it, how could I expect to fit in with my classmates? All year long I'd dropped hints to my parents that I wanted one, and on Chrismas Day I practically tore the box it came in to confetti.

It was the wrong jacket.

“I am sorry, but I went to a half-dozen stores, and they were all sold out," my mother half-explained, half-apologized. Of course they were sold out; thousands of kids wanted to conform as badly as I did. I was so upset, I started to cry, which looking back now was pretty selfish on my part, because my mother had tried really hard to get me the CPO jacket. I was absolutely miserable, as if my whole life were about to come to an end. As far as I was concerned, it was. But somehow she coaxed me into trying on the jacket. I slipped into it, looked in the mirror, and— "Hey *[sob],* this looks pretty good!" Actually, I had never seen anything like it. It was the type of coat worn by the Confederate Army during the Civil War, with gold buttons, a military collar and tabs. It was happening. I stopped my sniffling.

The next day I wore it to school, and I was pronounced by the people, for the first time, as "cool." Everybody wanted to know where I had got it. I had created something of an image for myself, and let me tell you, I wore that coat until the buttons fell off. I had accidentally learned an important lesson about being an individual, and it marked the beginning of my decision to be different.

2. I'm Not Everybody—So Who Am I?

The teen years are spent searching: for a fun time, for that *Playboy* or *Playgirl* magazine you stashed under the bed years ago, for pubic hair, but mostly for your identity and your place among your friends. Up until now you've been very much a product of your immediate environment, conforming to expectations and standards set by your parents, teachers and peers. It's as if upon birth you shot out of the gate like a racehorse with blinders on and charged around the track, never stopping to question your direction or to reflect on what you've accomplished so far in life. Before you never really analyzed why you are the way you are, why you have certain attitudes, whether or not you're satisfied with yourself. But now that's changing.

The lack of the knowledge, or awareness, of "Who am I?" can be the cause of a lot of anxiety. People die at a hundred and ten without ever knowing who they are, and you're expected to come up with the answer by your sixteenth birthday? Your self-identity is made up of a lot of things: race, sex, ethnic and religious backgrounds all play important parts in shaping the person you are, as do your experiences from childhood on, your attitudes, interests, values, qualities and goals. Even where you grow up helps affect your identity. If I'd been raised in rural Arkansas instead of suburban Long Island, today I'd be Lonesome Dee Snider, crooning country & western songs about my tractor that would break your heart.

Now, life would be much simpler if you could take all that information, feed it into a computer and get back a detailed printout, "This Is You." Or if you could just rely on your own instincts to figure it out. But that's almost impossible, and knowing what most people think about you doesn't help that much, either, because the way we see ourselves is sometimes very different from the way others see us.

One reason we are sometimes unhappy with ourselves is that lots of people judge others on the most apparent and superficial information, such as what they look like. Take my face, for example. (Please!) Ah, my face. When I was a kid, it caused me a lot of problems because I was... how shall I put this? … apretty ugly kid. (Don't sugar-coat it, Babe; give it to 'em straight.) It was like a cross to bear, a public sign that said I had been put on this earth to be harassed by others. I'd been a cute child (aren't we all, though?), but suddenly puberty started to play some pretty weird tricks on me, coinciding with my sexual awakening. Small children are rarely aware of who's good-looking and who's not, but as a teenager, I found myself being judged by others solely on my appearance.

Gradually I realized that 1 was not good-looking by conventional standards. Like, being at a party where the kissing game Spin-the-Bottle is being played, and when it points at you, the girl goes, "Oh

no," and makes a face as if she'd rather swallow poison. But it took me quite a while to admit to myself that I was not attractive. If I'd stare into the bathroom mirror and see this suave, good-looking young dude staring back, not the dork my classmates teased. I'd cock my head at just the right angle, affect a sort of leer, a swagger. "Hmm... /a *slight tilt of the head]*. Hey, I am good-looking; they just aren't seeing it. In fact, from this angle *[tilt a bit farther, practically severing my spinal cord]* I look a bit like... Robert Plant!"

It was not easy to do, but I finally admitted to myself that my preening and primping in the mirror was just that. And unless I could walk around with my head positioned permanently at that painful angle—and don't think I didn't try—I still looked like what I looked like to the rest of the world, no matter how I made myself appear in the mirror. I'm convinced that my dressing up in women's clothing, wearing makeup, spraying my hair for Twisted Sister was originally an effort to prove that I was attractive, even if in a perverse, corrupt, maniacal, campy sort of way.

Physical appearance—what an incredibly shallow thing by which to measure another human being, but unfortunately, that's a part of human nature most people don't think about unless they have to suffer because of it. And not only are people judged on their looks, they are usually stereotyped by them. The tall boy is told he ought to play basketball; the husky boy, football For girls it can be even more limiting: A slim figure and a pretty face are synonymous with popularity, while a less attractive girl is often encouraged to lower her expectations with regard to popularity. I remember wanting to play the tuba in the third grade. But I was a tall, skinny kid, even as an eight-year-old, and so I was encouraged to take up the trombone instead. Tall, skinny kid; long, skinny instrument.

It's such a stupid standard, because physical appearance has nothing to do with you as a person, since how you look is dependent on your parents' genes. I suppose if I could have been born with a face like actor Rob Lowe's, sure, I would have gone for it, but from what I can remember as a young fetus, no one gave me a choice. Back then you didn't even get a choice of meals. And it's such an arbitrary standard, because there's always someone better-looking or worse-looking than you.

To boot, up until your mid-teens, your looks are controlled pretty much by your parents, who buy your clothes for you and drag you to the stylist just when you think your hair looks perfect. It's important that you try to convince your parents, if not to let you shop alone, then at least to let you go with them to the store. When parents are left on their own in a teenager's clothing department, there's no telling what they may bring home—a pair of white buckskin shoes, for example.

Attention, parents; Mom, Dad, it doesn't take a lot of money to dress a kid coolly. A pair of jeans that fits right. A nice-looking shirt or blouse. While it may not seem like a big deal to you, it can mean the

difference between your teenager going to school, fitting in and being happy or getting hassled and feeling miserable over that drab, old-fashioned skirt that looks as if it could have been worn around the turn of the century.

I never could make my parents understand how important my appearance was to me, that it was one of the few ways I could express my identity. When I was fifteen, just starting school I began to let my hair grow a bit—-halfway over the and getting curly in back. But my father was a cop and very conservative.

One day he said to me. "Get in the car" and drove me to the local barber. He barked the instructions: "Give him one of these," patting the top of his head. My father had a military-type crew cut, which could be considered in style today, but back in the era of hippies and long hair, I might as well have tattooed "D-O-R-K" on my forehead. So there I was, the second week of high school a spindly, zit-faced freshman with my head practically shaved. The humiliation was unbearable. Even the few friends I had laughed and called me "bean head." "Dick head" "Penis head." Neighbors complained, dogs growled, property values went down—well maybe not, but it seemed that way to me. I was in tears, and my father could not at all understand why. (I'm in tears a lot aren't I?)

"I'm ugly," I told him, "I'm tall and skinny, with zits. I am not popular." Truth be told even my hair wasn't such a redeeming feature —it was all messy and frizzy, and obviously it was not the solution to my problem relating to others. But in my estimation it was the only thing that provided me with a little self-esteem. My hair meant as much to me as Samsons did to him, and my father had stripped me of that dignity, the one thing that made me feel good about myself.

He stepped back and took a hard look at me. Not at the son whom he had always loved but at the weird-looking kid with the cracking voice and pimples. And he realized what he had done. After that he never made me cut my hair again. And I haven't. But there was another force plotting against me.

Glands a-Go-Go

There is a scene in the hit remake of the movie *The Fly* in which scientist Seth Brundle, who has accidently jiggered his genes with those of an insect, peers into the mirror at the living horror he has become. He tugs off his fingernails, plucks out his teeth, observes strange new growths on his new fly face. His body is completely out of control.

I know how he felt.

When you are a teenager, the mirror's reflection can be painful. What unwelcome surprise has Mother Nature wrought today? The body and features you were growing comfortable with are suddenly

undergoing rapid-fire transition. Sometimes she seems pretty sadistic, presenting you with that pimple on your forehead—which, you are convinced, can be seen by all living creatures within a fifty-mile radius and is not merely a blemish but the beginning of a horn. Just what you needed. Invariably this happens on the morning before a big date, a speech in front of the class or, best of all, yearbook-picture day. Even worse is coming home afterward and finding a fat, new zit. OhmiGod! How long has it been there? Who saw it? This *had* to be the day you asked that beautiful girl in English class for a date. No wonder she said no.

For girls, it is during the ages of nine to twelve, and boys, eleven to thirteen, that their bodies begin to mature, with the greatest amount of growth usually taking place at age twelve for females and fourteen for males. Unfortunately this growth process occurs in spurts. Figures, doesn't it? You get taller but often don't gain much weight, and your neck, arms and legs develop faster and disproportionately to the rest of your body, exploding out from your torso. You feel like a building under construction, only the workers have put in the top floor and the spiral staircases before finishing the foundation. To feed this storehouse of energy that is your body, you may find yourself needing more sleep or becoming ravenously hungry. Girls' caloric requirements increase 25 percent and then level off, while for boys it's an incredible 90 percent.

Other signs of physical maturity are coarser and oilier hair; facial hair, perspiration odor; the shifting of baby fat on girls; dandruff, which is flakes of dead scalp skin cells; dropping and cracking voices, the result of the sudden growth of the vocal cords; development of the sexual organs (which is covered in Chapter 3, on discovering your sexuality); and pimples and acne, which seem to identify you officially as a card-carrying teenager. Acne is the result of dead skin cells, bacteria and fatty acids clogging hair follicles, and the result of acne is usually unmerciful goofing from your less sympathetic peers: "Pizza face," "Vomit head;› "He looks like he lost an acid fight," "His mother fed him with a slingshot." And those are your friends.

For a long time it was thought that eating too much sugar or chocolate caused acne, but dermatologists, or skin doctors, have discounted such theories in recent years. This is good news. You might still be a pizza face, but you'll be a happy one. However, acne can be further aggravated when the glands are activated by emotions such as tension. It is recommended that you keep your face, and body, spotlessly clean with a mild, medicated soap and use the over-the-counter face medicines available in any drugstore or supermarket. If your skin problem especially disturbs you, ask your parents if you can see a dermatologist, who may prescribe a stronger medication, such as

high-octane gasoline and a match. (Just kidding.) Also, if you're a teenage boy with acne who has begun shaving—you know, picking off those few pathetic hairs wavering on your upper lip—you might want to consult with a doctor regarding any precautions, so as not to worsen the skin problem. You want to look clean-shaven, not as if you'd just performed a self-sacrifice.

It is natural to experience a great deal of body anxiety during this period. Boys may worry that they are scrawny and underdeveloped—especially since females, on the average, are slightly taller than males between the ages of twelve and fourteen, and are heavier between the ages of ten and fourteen. On the other hand, tall girls may fret that they are going to grow to an abnormal height and will have to reside permanently inside a missile silo somewhere in the Midwest. The good news is that in the race toward physical maturity, all participants finish relatively close, with girls reaching 98 percent of their adult height by age sixteen and boys by eighteen. The bad news is, your nose never stops growing. Really. I know.

Our Obsession with Beauty

Our society loves beauty, yet how many people are really naturally, perfectly beautiful? *Very* few. And people whom we think of as beautiful or handsome often look so good because they are carefully made up or photographed. Like it or not, we are influenced by other people's ideas about what's beautiful and what's not.

Taken to the extreme, a person's anxiety over his body can result in destructive behavior. Our society overemphasizes unrealistic physical standards, which we are bombarded with through newspaper, magazine and TV advertisements. Young girls are especially influenced by society's idea of an attractive figure. Dolls such as the popular and busty Barbie present physical ideals that are impossible to achieve, due to two little concepts: gravity and reality.

There seem to be fewer accepted physical stereotypes for men. Imagine: Three-hundred-plus-pound William "the Refrigerator" Perry of the football Chicago Bears is named one of the ten sexiest men in America by *Playgirl* magazine, whereas a woman nicknamed "the Fridge" would be asked to remain indoors or be deported to the Russian Olympic team.

Those standards of beauty also change. During the Renaissance women with big, round bellies were considered the epitome of attractiveness. In the 1940s husky, buxom actresses such as Jane Russell had young men panting. Since the 1960s, however, thin has been in, and some young women carry their fear of fatness to an extreme, developing eating disorders.

Experts believe that eating disorders currently affect as many as one in five young women between the ages of twelve and thirty. Only 4 percent of all anorexics are men. *Anorexia* is literally self-starvation. The anorexic is usually well behaved, a perfectionist, and not eating is a way for her to exert control over her body just as she does in other aspects of her life. She is also a person who has low self-esteem, insists she is too heavy and continues to starve herself. Anorexics can die from starvation or from complications of near-starvation.

Almost half of all anorexics eventually suffer from *bulimia,* which means "insatiable hunger." A bulimic, or binger/purger, stuffs herself with food, then intentionally vomits or forces herself to excrete by taking lots of laxatives. Bulimia is what claimed singer Karen Carpenter's life in 1983, and other celebrities such as actress Jane Fonda and Cherry Boone, daughter of, you guessed it, our hero Pat, have talked publicly about their experiences with the disease.

Both anorexia and bulimia can be treated successfully, through medical attention and, in some cases, hospitalization, Psychotherapy may also be needed, for at the root of any eating disorder is a psychological problem; anorexia and bulimia are just physical symptoms. Anorexics and bulimics are not merely obsessed with our culture's demand for thinness; they are unhappy people who are unhappy about themselves.

The same is often true of obese, or excessively fat, people. Similar problems, different ways of coping. Dieting alone will not help, and counseling is recommended to resolve the problems that led to the weight increase in the first place. You may have an overeating disorder if you:

- Eat even when you're not hungry.
- Eat at mealtimes and binge secretly.
- Overeat when you're upset, anxious, happy, angry.
- Eat to spite others who comment on your weight.
- Are twenty or more pounds over your ideal weight.

All teenagers should consult a physician when they are dieting, to tailor a plan just for you. A safe, sensible diet might be one in which you eat 500 fewer calories a day. One pound of fat requires 3,500 calories to maintain, so you would lose one pound a week. Avoid starvation diets, which are bad for you physically, mentally and emotionally. To grow and feel well, you must eat enough body building foods. Dieting of any kind should be accompanied by exercise, to burn off fat and to build muscle. Whatever you do, don't take diet pills, even over-the-counter brands, because they can cause anxiety, agitation, dizziness and other potentially dangerous side effects.

If you are suffering from an eating disorder, or someone you

know is, there are many treatment centers able to help you. Consult the Help Yourself chapter at the back of this book for their addresses and phone numbers.

Every Dog Has His Day (Woof! Woof!)

Fortunately, as you grow older, your freedom to control your life includes your appearance. And your appearance may change naturally. How many average-looking teens evolve into distinguished-looking men, such as Bill Wyman of the Rolling Stones, who looks better at age fifty than he did at twenty-five. Or plain girls who acquire a gracefulness as they mature into womanhood.

Sometimes people have to grow into their faces and bodies. I'm convinced that I am one of these people, and when I turn fifty, I'm going to be a smokin' dude! On the other hand, there are cute twelve-year-olds whose faces never mature along with their bodies and who look less cute as adults. Attractiveness is relative and changes all the time. You see it at high school reunions: The male heartthrob with the gorgeous full head of hair is now fat and bald. The prettiest girl no longer turns heads like she used to.

I know what you're saying: "What do I do *now?"* If it's going to make you feel better about yourself, analyze your features and make the most of what you've got. If you wear glasses, either take the time to purchase a cooler pair, or get contact lenses. If you've got a long or large nose, and I speak from experience, learn to wear your hair in a manner that deemphasizes the offending proboscis. If one of your strong points is your eyes, feature your eyes. If you've got an awesome bod, work out and make it better. I decided to stop pretending I was a matinee idol and accept the way I looked. I was skinny. Now, how was I going to maximize it? To develop an awesome bod, I got into body building, an activity I still pursue. I discovered I looked better by letting my curly hair dry naturally instead of futilely trying to tame it with a brush or straighten it with a blow dryer. A bottle of peroxide didn't hurt.

You will find, thankfully, that as you get older, looks become less and less important. Naturally there will always be those who view others as objects and want "a stud" or "a fox" to show off like a possession. Some people never outgrow their childish and shallow attitudes. Like myself. (Just kidding.)

Your looks are merely your packaging. If you want to improve them, fine, do whatever you feel you have to do. Ultimately you will be judged on your personality, not on your pretty blue eyes or great build. Besides, a good person is pretty or handsome no matter what he or she looks like, just as there are plenty of people who are attractive

only until they open their mouths.

Is filmmaker Woody Allen considered handsome by "normal" standards? No. But his intellect, humor and accomplishments make him sexy to thousands of women. Talent is sexy. Kindness is sexy. Confidence is sexy. Believe it or not, whereas I was unattractive as a youth, I now have women squeal over me. Suddenly my fame has made me physically attractive in an interesting way. My face, which was once my curse, has become my fortune, which is positive proof that this is a pretty strange world we live in.

It's those inner qualities that last a lifetime, not cosmetics. If you have good looks, consider yourself blessed; but never fool yourself into thinking you will be able to coast on a handsome or pretty face forever. I believe that everyone is capable of being attractive, And there is practically nothing that cannot be overcome, Work at that packaging if it is going to make you feel good about yourself and exude confidence. But work doubly hard at improving the product. And that brings us to the end of our marketing meeting.

Branded

I wasn't always a nerd. In fact, up until the time I was about ten, I was pretty popular and a good student. Then my parents moved three short miles from Freeport to neighboring Baldwin. Trouble.

My first day at Schubert Elementary School I strutted into the playground feeling pretty cocky and proceeded to pick a fight with, unbeknown to me, the toughest kid in the school. In front of the entire student body, he picked me up and hurled me against a brick wall, like an Olympic athlete tossing a shotput.

Bam!

The die was cast. I became an outcast. Had I beaten him up, of course, I would have been regarded as the coolest dude in school. As Charlie Brown from the comic strip "Peanuts" often said, "If I catch the ball, I'm the hero. If I drop it, I'm the goat." In my case, I grew horns. I was branded because I had been stupid enough not to scope out the male competition in the playground beforehand.

My second day at my new elementary school, I met a gorgeous girl who had been branded a "cootie" all the way back in kindergarten. She had no friends, cried a lot and was miserable But when she turned twelve years old, she really began to blossom physically and turned into a beautiful young women. Yet no one would go near her. To them, she still had cooties. (By the way, what the hell are cooties anyway?)

We graduated from Schubert to junior high school, which combined kids from several elementary schools, and to the new boys

from the other schools, she was hardly a cootie; she was a fox. Within a few weeks she went from being the least popular girl in our class to one of the most popular in the entire school, and the guys from Schubert, who'd taunted her for so long, looked like a bunch of jerks for letting her slip through our hands.

It's frighteningly easy to give in to these stereotypes. How many kids are labeled dumb and accept it? Subconsciously they act stupid and revel in the attention every time they give a wrong answer in class, because at least they have an identity. In my own case, I was labeled the class clown and reveled in that kind of attention. Or how about the nonathletic kid who gets branded in elementary school as a spaz, a wimp—even though in the next few years his body will go through an enormous amount of change—and who lives up (or down) to everybody else's low expectations. He tells himself that he's no good, and so when the ball is hit to him in right field (which, of course, is where all the nonathletes are put because no one ever hits to right field), he misses it, the ball bounces off his head and everybody laughs. In any activity or with any task, if you believe that you are going to fail, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and you will indeed fail.

Reputations can be damaging to popular kids as much as to the unpopular crowd. The attractive girl and the athletic guy who are accepted for that alone may not feel the need to develop in other, more important areas and will be at a disadvantage when people who don't know them see only a lame, uninteresting person.

Branding goes on not just in school but for the rest of your life, but as an adult, you have more freedom to escape and avoid such situations. As a kid, you are stuck with other kids with whom you may or may not have anything in common. Until graduation this is your environment, like it or not. Besides, there are only a few arenas in which to prove yourself. Talents that are encouraged later in life—in my case, singing and performing, for example—may not always be encouraged within the school system or by your peers. So someone is either "smart" or "dumb." "Funny." "Athletic." "Cute" or "ugly."

Daniel Snider was branded a dork—a dick—and I remained one throughout the rest of my days in the Baldwin school system, even though I was a good student, athletic, and was the lead voice of the high school choir. (I don't know; sounds like a dick to me.) Other kids received their brands and gravitated toward others like themselves, forming cliques, which every school has. At Baldwin High there were the intellectuals, The freaks, united by rock & roll music and drugs. The jocks. The greasers/dirtbags. The jocks wouldn't associate with the intellectuals, who wouldn't hang out with the dirtbags, who wouldn't go near the freaks. And the nerds? Forget about it. Nobody

even came within spitting distance of them, although I heard a few got spit on.

Here's an example of how intense cliques can be: My best friend, Don, hung out with the freaks because he had long hair and was a musician, but he was really smart and extremely handsome. The essence of cool. I was walking behind him in the school hall one day as he and this girl from the popular crowd passed each other. It was obvious from their smiles that they liked what they saw. Each was giving what I call the ten-foot eye, staring longingly as they approached and then looking over their shoulder as they went by. The sexual tension was so feverish, you expected them to spin around, run to each other and start doing it right there in the hall. But she just went her way, and Don his.

I was blown away. "Why don't you ask her out?" I asked Don. "She wants you, dude."

He replied, "She wouldn't go out with me no matter how much she liked me. No way." And he was right. They wouldn't even cross the hall to talk to each other! How ridiculous.

Fitting into a group often provides—though only temporarily – an identity. At the time your group may offer the only clue as to who you are and where you belong. To fit in with the crowd, you may adopt the uniform, the mannerisms, the attitude of those in the group. By being a group member, you have the security of having been accepted by your peers, and yet at the same time you can project the distinct identity provided by the group. In my high school circa the early 1970s, there was no confusing the long-haired freaks from the short-haired jocks.

I was desperate to fit in with others because I had not yet developed an awareness of who and/or what I was. In a way 1 looked to them to endorse me, and their opinions of me mattered more to me than my own. I was a nomadic nerd - sounds romantic doesn't it? - wandering from group to group, for a time hanging out with the dirtbags, until I discovered that I didn't enjoy hassling other people, knocking books out of their hands for no reason, as dirtbags often did. Strike one.

Despite the fact that I was good in sports, I didn't cut it with the jock crowd because I believed there was more to life than football, heaven forbid. Strike two.

The closest I came was in joining the freaks, the hippies. It was the one group where being something of an oddball was partially tolerated, but even there I was eventually blackballed because I was a phony, which they recognized. Strike three.

Making Changes

Probably one of a young person's greatest fears is that nothing will change, that everything is permanent. You are fourteen and unpopular. Therefore you're going to die at age eighty-four without a friend in the world. You're a fifteen-year-old girl who's never been on a date? Consequently you're not going to have a date for the rest of your life. Those daydreams about one day having a husband and children? Forget about 'em. That zit on your chin? Give it a name, get to know it well, because it's going to remain there *for the rest of your life.*

Of course none of this is true, but it's hard to realize that when your world view is mostly limited to the green-tiled school halls and the hanging fluorescent lights. You have yet to experience the big wide world outside Main Street and your hometown. You look ahead to the day you will graduate from school, and it's like peering through the wrong end of a telescope: It seems so far away, you don't think you'll survive it. Don't worry. You won't. (Just kidding.) But you will. Things will change. You will change, whether you want to or not.

They say that you can't teach an old dog new tricks. I disagree. It's just a matter of how badly he wants to learn. How badly do you want to improve your life? Sit. Roll over. Good dog. See? I told you.

I'm not saying that it's easy to make changes in yourself. Often the self-examination process is painful, because for it to work, you have to be completely honest with yourself. When I came to the realization that I possessed many good points, I also came face-to-face with my weaknesses. I saw this introvert, who never wanted to be called on in class or have any attention directed at him, and I saw this phony who tried so hard to fit in with his peers. I liked neither, so I began to make changes in myself during my junior year in high school. No one seemed to notice at first, but I knew the true value of my self-worth (at the time, only about thirty-seven cents). And I knew that it was increasing.

I received an encouraging sign when the choir I sang in traveled to another school to perform a concert, and the girls there actually liked me. They had no preconceived notions about who or what 1 was; they didn't know that back at Baldwin High I was a dork. To them I was Joe Cool, Boss-o'-Chicks!

Though your opportunities for change are limited now, they still exist. You just have to grab them. Although moving in the fifth grade made me a nerd, moving to a new area and attending a new school turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to my brother Doug.

Doug is six years younger than me and the baby of the family. Because he was baby-faced as a teenager and seemed to live in the

shadow of his four older brothers, he was teased a lot while at Baldwin High. Now my parents were moving to a town called Massapequa, and he was pretty scared at the thought of having to start all over at a new school. Being the new kid can be pretty weird.

He came to me one day for some advice, practically in tears I pointed out to him that attending this new school could be the biggest break of his lie.

"Nobody knows what you are or who you are. This is your big chance to become the person you want to be, not the person others want you to be. You can be anything, and your new schoolmates will accept that. "So, what do you wanna be?"

He replied, "I want to be cool, to be one of those guys who bop around the schoolyard totally confident. That's what I honestly feel I am."

"Well, then—poof!—you are cool." All that was missing was a magic wand.

The next day Doug attended his first day at the new school, and he bopped and strutted.

"It was unbelievable!" he said the next time I saw him. "I went in and strutted my stuff, and everybody went, 'Man, he's awesome!" Instant awesome. All because Mom and Dad decided to move.

You'll have that same freedom—if not right away, then soon enough. The important thing to remember is that only you can accurately measure your self-worth. If you're not satisfied with the person you are, you've got the power to change.

If you decide that you're too heavy and that you're going to go on a diet, the boost to your confidence is immediate. It may be several months before you lose the weight you want, but you know that your days as a heavyweight are over.

Sometimes it helps to make symbolic changes, just to remind yourself of the progress that is underway. Start hanging out with a new crowd. Shave your head. Get an after-school job. Buy a car. Do something radical; leave your old self behind. Make yourself come alive.

My own symbolic change was to use my middle name Dee instead of Daniel. It was my declaration to myself and to the world that Danny the Wimp was dead. Enter Dee. The name Snider, though, I always liked and never considered dropping. I wanted to be snide, so I thought my last name matched my personality: snide, snider, snidest. In fact, my music-publishing company is called Snidest Music.

Shortly after changing my name, I joined Twisted Sister and my life began turning around.

Shy? Change It

I was pretty shy in my early teens, especially in strange surroundings. I'd try to blend in with the scenery, so that I wouldn't be noticed. Shyness is tough to overcome because it's self-perpetuating. Someone walks over to you, says hello, and you freeze up; you're not a good conversationalist because *you're shy*. When you do manage to blurt out a coherent sentence, it comes out all wrong. You're so tense around people that an attempted smile gets twisted into a taut grimace. Maybe people misinterpret your shyness as conceit or aloofness. "She never talks to anybody. What a snob."

If you're shy, you probably worry about others liking you. Maybe it's because you don't really like yourself, so you wonder how anyone else could. That was the case with me. Now turn that logic around: If you learn to like yourself, then how could anyone else *not* like you? And if they don't, who cares? Once I added up my good points, I pushed myself to be self-confident, even though, truthfully, I was still pretty insecure. I had to force myself in another way, too. While before I'd always withdraw socially, allowing my shyness to inhibit me from meeting people and experiencing life, I decided to become more outgoing and to deliberately throw myself into situations. It was a challenge to myself, and it worked. I'd always been afraid to talk to girls. Now when I saw a member of the opposite sex who I was interested in—anything in a skirt, actually—I ran over and struck up a conversation before I had a chance to chicken out. Once I'd introduced myself and was standing in front of her, I had little choice but to dive in—to the conversation, that is. And—surprise, surprise—sometimes it worked. Instead of letting the situation control me, I seized control of it

You say you're scared to take the plunge? Don't give yourself time to think about It. Besides, what's the worst that could happen? A girl could say to me, "Get lost, Jerk." Many of them did— the law of averages,I learned that being rejected by a stranger was not the awful, death blow I'd thought it would be. I built a thicker skin and found that my fears were way out of proportion to the reality of the situation.

No Fiends? Change It

When you were a little kid, friendships usually required minimal work. They just sort of happened, often out of convenience. Most of your friends lived on your block, and you all played ball or made mud pies together. For a game of tag, you called on Neil next door. When you wanted to play Ken and Barbie Go to a Punk-Rock Club Where Ken Insults a Patron and Gets His Face Rearranged, you took your Barbie doll and strolled a few houses down to see Betsy, who owned

Ken. And in the summer, everybody's best friend was the kid whose parents had a swimming pool in the backyard. Pretty simple.

Now there's more involved in maintaining friendships, such as loyalty, trust, shared interests and values. They're no longer automatic and you don't necessarily involve the same friends in all activities. Ben is a rock&roll fan who dislikes sports, so on Friday night the two of you attend a rock concert at the MegaDome, but the next day you play football with your friend Kirk, a jock who couldn't care less about music.

You'll find that as you change, so will your friends, and you may grow apart. But there are always new friends to be made, and some old friends—very special friends—will stick by you no matter what.

How You Make Friends

It's late at night. You're sitting on the couch with a date. Slowly, slip your arm around your friend's shoulder and... wait! We're discussing how to *make* friends, not *put* the make on them.

If you feel lonely and without friends, take a good look at yourself. What is it about you that you like? If your answer is "not very much"—like mine was—you have some serious work ahead of you before you can expect others to like you too. If your answer is "I'm talented," or "I'm fun to be with," it's possible that you haven't been communicating these parts of your personality to others, or that you're not being completely honest with yourself. Stop lying.

Why doesn't anybody else recognize your wonderful qualities, you may wonder. Maybe it's because they are as obsessed with themselves as you are with yourself. Yes, you egomaniac, you have some very special qualities, but so do others. Have you taken the time to notice? It's an old saying but true: To have friends, you must be a friend. Brilliant, huh? Learn to talk to others not just about your interests but theirs as well And learn to be a good listener.

Not being popular sucks. You hug the wall as you walk down the hall eyes downcast. You resign yourself to loneliness even though you may long to be outgoing and friendly. You just don't know how. You want someone else to make it easier for you, and you can't wait for that person to come. But instead, why not take the initiative yourself and be as friendly as you can to others, without being a phony. Not everyone is going to like you, but that's okay. After all, you don't like everyone you meet, do you?

Don't limit your friends to one particular circle. What about the girl who sits near you in home room? You've had some reasonably

pleasant, casual conversations, and it's apparent that the two of you have a lot in common: You both like skating and boys' derrieres. There is obviously the potential for a friendship, but you haven't pursued it because she hangs out with the intellectual crowd, which you've never felt comfortable in. No one is asking you to be friends with the entire crowd, just her. You're limited enough in terms of the people you meet in school. Why limit your options even more?

Having others like you may be important to you, but it's never as important as liking yourself. You should always be comfortable alone and not have to be surrounded by others constantly, I may have been a loner in high school, but that doesn't mean I was always lonely. A loner is a person who has accepted the idea of being alone and appreciates it for what it is. He learns to enjoy his own company. I learned not to be afraid of being alone and how to enjoy the solitude. For one thing, I never argue with myself. Seriously, I was afraid sometimes, but I refused to let myself get down about it, because to me that would have been like allowing those who ostracized me to beat me, and I refused to give anyone that satisfaction.

Even loners have friends—other loners. Individuals who like to associate with other individuals so that they can talk about what individuals they all are, and what are they going to do today that is so individualistic and different. (Read it again, it makes sense.) Actually, the few friendships I did have were intense, which may lend credence to the saying that nerds have fewer but better friendships. (I said it so it's a saying.) My friends and I didn't have many other people in whom to confide, so we spent a lot of time together and were pretty open with one another. Some people need many friends; some need just a few. What my friends and I needed was psychotherapy, but that's another story.

You Are Somebody

At sixteen I came to the realization that I could not possibly be such a bad person as to merit the treatment, or nontreatment, I was receiving from those around me. Dork? I had a lot of things going for me: I was pretty intelligent, a good athlete, talented at singing. I was a reasonably nice person. Once again I'd peer into the mirror and see someone who apparently no one else saw. Who is this guy, and why is he hiding? It was no illusion, either. Those around me, whom I'd allowed to dictate to me, *were wrong.*

Just because I didn't fit into their mold didn't mean I wasn't somebody. Besides, *they didn't even know me.* I was somebody, and it was at sixteen that for the first time I said it to myself and believed it. I liked the feeling, too. Whether or not others believed it didn't matter,

as long as I did.

As my self-confidence increased, life got continually better. I began to grow my hair (on my head, too), which made me more comfortable with my appearance. I started dressing more outrageously and pulled it off because of my newfound attitude. All of a sudden people who had never given me the time of day noticed me. During my senior year in high school, the captain of the football team cornered me in the hallway and asked why I'd never gone out for the team, which made me feel pretty good. Several students commented to me, "I don't know what it is, but you seem...different." I was. "You look different." I did. Feeling pleased with myself even relaxed the muscles in my face. Ah, no more headaches.

I began to get accepted for who I was, although by that time I'd lost any interest in their acceptance. (By then, I figured, I was too cool to be hanging out with *them.)* All because of a little confidence. I carried it to the extent that when people asked me,

"How ya doin'?" instead of replying with the usual "Okay," "Not bad," I'd always respond, "Great!" "How ya feelin'?"

"Excellent!"

It was a self-psych on my part. I wanted everybody to think that I was having the time of my life. Maybe I was even trying to convince myself of that. But it made everybody think that I was up to something, and yeah, I did begin to have a better time.

Developing Self-Confidence (That Little-Used Muscle)

You don't just wake up one day and feel confident; it has to be based on reality. It requires work. What helped me to gain confidence was playing music, because it was something I was good at and something others appreciated. My rock & roll band would perform at all the school dances, and suddenly everyone was cheering for and dancing to the nerd. Even Fred the bully would approach the bandstand to make a song request.

Very often people who lack confidence lack something to be confident about. They get bored, not only with life but with themselves. If you feel that way, find something that interests you and go for it. It takes only one skill to make you feel better about yourself. The great thing about being a teenager is that you've got plenty of time to do stuff, so join a band or a club, take up an instrument or a hobby. I know it sounds lame, but it's true.

Boredom is the teenager's curse, and it's very easy to be bored when you don't have much money or transportation. But it's also fixable. If there's not one activity that interests you, get an after-school job. At least then you'll have some money, and it's easier to party with

cash in your pocket. You can buy those parts to customize your car, get a guitar or a new hockey stick. Just involve yourself in something.

You Are What You Is

As you grow older, you will come to realize that not all problems have simple solutions and that some problems are unsolvable. Change yourself—sounds like a job for Superman. Well, I did, and I don't think it was anything exceptional. Anybody can do it if he wants to badly enough. You can't just half-believe, though, and that applies to anything in life: You've got to believe deep down in your soul that you can improve yourself—become a better, stronger and happier person. Frankly, if you don't, you're dead meat.

It may also sound a bit scary. Most big changes are, because there's never any guarantee that you're making a change for the better. But I look at it this way: If you're dissatisfied with something in your life, to change it is a fifty-fifty proposition that you're going to see some improvement. Not the greatest odds, maybe, but the alternative is that if you don't try to change the situation, it's 100 percent positive that you're going to stay unhappy. Plus, if you're still not satisfied with your situation, you can always change it again. And again. Until you get it right.

Coming to that self-realization and determining that I could improve myself was the turning point in my life. If I have any regrets, it's that so much of my energy was wasted on proving myself to others, when all along the only person I needed to impress was me. Remember that. You don't need the approval from those around you to validate you, and you shouldn't feel you have to improve yourself for anybody else's sake except your own. If others approve, great; if they don't, so what? What matters is to be pleased with yourself and like yourself. Believe in you.

3. What's Going On Down There?

When I was twelve I learned about sex from a book, courtesy of my parents. Where they got it, I don't know. Probably at the family doctor's office. Because I was convinced my father was all-powerful and was probably glaring at me through my bedroom walls at that very moment, at first I was a bit nervous even opening it. Just reading about sex seemed as "bad" or "wrong" as having it.

I hesitantly flipped through it. It was very clinical, describing how the man's sperm fertilized the woman's egg and so on. What I wanted to know was, how did the sperm reach the egg? According to the book, that mysterious rendezvous occurred "when the man and woman are *close together."*

After that every time I saw my parents hugging—close together—I anticipated the arrival of another baby brother. After all, we already had six kids in the family. And when I saw older boys and girls hugging and kissing... well, you can imagine. Fortunately, by the time my wife and I were ready to have a kid I had learned the proper method of doing the deed and, I might add, had practiced it vigorously. Otherwise the two of us might have stood together with our clothes on, hugging and groping forever, each accusing the other of not trying hard enough.

Unbeknown to my parents 1 began discovering my sexuality long before they gave me The Book. As far back as nursery, as the matter of fact. I remember eyeing this one cute little babe (literally), and I could tell she was going to be a knockout when she got older. If only I'd had the nerve to put down my bottle and get her phone number.

All right, maybe I'm exaggerating a bit. But I do recall fantasizing about me and my kindergarten teacher trapped in the classroom—alone—with a storm raging outside...

The wind was howling, the trees seeming to kiss the earth from its ferocity. 'Don't worry, Miss Mclntyre," I whispered, finishing my erotic fingerpainting of a pencil and a donut, 'Til save you." And though I couldn't even reach her waist, I wrapped my arms protectively about her thighs, wishing I had remembered to wash the fingerpaint off my hands

Why am I telling you all this? Let's talk about you.

In Chapter 2 we discussed the general growth that takes place between the ages of nine and sixteen. Here we'll look at the sexual development that occurs during the time of life called *puberty,* which is derived from the Latin word for "groin." That seems somehow appropriate. During the one and a half to two years of puberty, you reach sexual maturity: Girls become women capable of bearing children, and boys become men capable of fathering them. At least

this is true biologically speaking. Unfortunately, sexual maturity and emotional maturity never arrive together. Emotional maturity usually arrives later, and this little timing discrepancy is where all the problems start.

As you read this, keep in mind that not everyone develops at the same rate. From the day you were born, your developmental schedule has been unique, and it will continue to be for the rest of your life. You may be either a little early or a little late, which is perfectly normal. In fact, the word *normal* covers a wide range of timetables and patterns. Just remember the two important words when it comes to learning about your sexuality: Don't touch—er, I mean, *don't worry*.

In Girls

The most obvious sign of sexual maturity is breast growth, which begins at age ten or eleven, with the nipple elevating to form what is called the "bud" stage. Then from eleven to four-teen, the age of maximum growth, the breast begins to further enlarge, and the nipple assumes its pigmentation, or coloring. Both the nipple and the areola, which is the ring surrounding the nipple, start to elevate. Then between fourteen and sixteen the breast begins to fill out, conforming to adult size, with the nipple and areola well developed. It often isn't until the late teens or even early twenties that the areola recedes and becomes flush with the breast. It is normal for the nipples to excrete a discharge and for the breasts to swell just prior to your period, as well as for one breast to develop faster than the other. As you can tell, I've studied this subject long and hard.

Not so obvious are some other signs of sexual maturity, or pubescence. The vagina lengthens and broadens, and there is rapid growth internally, of the ovaries (the female reproductive organs that produce the eggs to be fertilized by the man's sperm) and the uterus, or womb: the organ that nourishes an unborn child as it develops. Also around this time you being to grow straight, pigmented pubic hair that later becomes kinkier, and what is called auxiliary hair, on the face and legs and under the arms. (Why do I feel like Dr. Ruth?) Once the internal sexual organs are developed, menstruation begins. The onset of menstruation is perhaps the most profound change that takes place in a girl's body. It is also called the *menarche,* which comes from the Latin word for "clock."

Menstruation is the body's monthly discharge of blood, mucus and broken-down cell tissue—nutrients that line the uterus every month. If the egg is fertilized, the menstrual periods cease, and the tissue and fluid that would otherwise have been discharged are retained to nourish the growing fetus, or unborn baby. If you don't

know, this is called pregnancy, which you don't want to occur before you're ready. What usually happens though, is that the egg is not fertilized, the woman is not pregnant (what a relief), and then this now unnecessary lining slowly seeps into the vagina. Girls begin having their period as early as nine years old and as late as eighteen, although the average age is approximately thirteen. Menstruation usually occurs six months to a year after the breasts begin to develop.

Girls are given conflicting messages about menstruation. On the one hand, it is portrayed as a mystical metamorphosis into womanhood; on the other, it's somehow unclean. As with most things sexual, it is the object of many old wives' tales, such as that menstruation turns you into a stark raving mad killer (ever hear that stupid expression, She's on the rag?), or that others can somehow tell if you are having your period. The only way anybody else will know is if you shuffle down the hall with your knees locked together and a grim expression on your face.

The first time a girl menstruates can be disconcerting: What is happening to your body? Are you bleeding to death? However, don't will your Bon Jovi LPs to your best girlfriend for fear the end is near. You actually lose only about three tablespoonfuls of blood per period. Some girls do suffer from disorders: extremely painful cramps, excessive bleeding, bleeding at times other than menstruation or absence of blood flow. If you experience any of these problems, tell your mother and/or go to a physician; preferably a gynecologist, who is a doctor who specializes in treating women. In the beginning girls may be irregular;—that is, miss a period every now and then, or have a period once or twice, then not have one again for several months. And especially slim or excessively athletic girls may not begin menstruating until fairly late in adolescence, or may menstruate and then stop temporarily.

It is normal to experience sexual/body anxiety. "Am I slim enough?" "Are my breasts large enough?" are typical concerns, as girls become more interested in their attractiveness to the opposite sex. If it's any consolation, girls, the opposite sex has its own worries.

In Boys

Boys mature later than girls. It is usually around the age of twelve or thirteen that the penis, scrotum and testes (a.k.a., balls) begin to grow, followed over the next three years by a more rapid growth and kinky pubic hair. More than half of all boys experience a slightly painful swelling of the breasts, called *gynecomastia,* and though at the time you may worry that you're doomed to exit pubescence with a bust the size of a burlesque dancer's, don't worry—it will soon subside.

Usually between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, a boy experiences his first ejaculation, a discharge of seminal fluid, though this does not necessarily mean that you are capable of producing children. Seventy percent of all teenage boys have had "wet dreams," an involuntary seminal emission that occurs while you are asleep.

It is also around this time that you will make perhaps the biggest discovery of your life—erections. Guys, read carefully here, because it is this physiological phenomenon that can get you into deep trouble for the rest of your born days. You probably experienced them as far back as early childhood, even infancy, but didn't realize just what was going on. An erection occurs when the veins that normally lead blood away from the penis constrict, and the penis's erectile tissue becomes filled with blood, causing it to become erect. It is truly an engineering marvel. I'll say! Before any of this happens, however, your primary sex organ—the brain—must be stimulated so that it can send nerve impulses to the region. Erections have a nasty habit of springing up when you're in front of the class solving a math problem at the blackboard. My only advice is to think of who led the National League in runs batted in last year, and hopefully it will peter out, so to speak.

Masturbation

Warning! Warning! Before you read any further: *Keep both hands on the book!* I repeat, keep both hands on the book. Maybe I should have told you that at the start of this chapter.

Sorry.

Jerking off, wanking off, flogging the log, three-finger linger—those are just some of the innumerable expressions for one of America's favorite and most frequently practiced national pastimes.

Masturbation, or manual stimulation of the sex organs, is a touchy subject (sorry, bad pun). People are always joking about it—much the same way I'm doing here—but nobody ever admits to actually doing it. It is a healthy, normal sexual release practiced by more than nine of ten teenagers—boys and girls alike— and during your teen years it may be your only sexual release. (Your parents are going to love me.) One thing in its favor is that it certainly is the least risky; no one ever got pregnant or contracted a disease alone. The current average age for beginning masturbation is just shy of twelve, which is about how old I was.

I threw my fist upon the bed and ravished it. We'd always been relatively close to each other, but who knew of the passion lurking between us?

I must confess that I didn't have the slightest idea of what was going on. But once I took the situation in hand (ahem!), the resultant

physical sensation certainly seemed pleasurable. I remember feeling aroused, excited and apprehensive simultaneously, and at the moment of orgasm—the physical climax of sexual excitement—a bit stunned. "I did that?" Then my hand fell asleep. I wondered if it would respect me in the morning.

This stimulation is so unlike anything you've experienced before, it is very natural to be concerned over an ejaculation, perhaps more so for boys than for girls, whose ejaculations rarely discharge from the vagina. What the hell is that stuff? A sign of cancer? Pus? If it is pus, maybe I'd better see if I've *gotten it all out.* Don't worry. Each ejaculation—approximately a teaspoon-ful—is merely seminal fluid and between 250 million and 450 million sperm cells. More about those "li'l rascals" when we discuss birth control and teen pregnancy in Chapter 5. No skipping!

Sexy Thoughts

It is normal to fantasize, or to think sexual thoughts, while masturbating: about your girlfriend or boyfriend, an acquaintance at school, celebrities, Dee Snider (for you girls), strangers —just about anybody is fair game as a fantasy figure. These fantasies are absolutely normal, as long as they are not perceived as reality and acted upon in daily life (and as long as they do not revolve around Pee-Wee Herman).

I rarely fantasized about a specific person. In a way, this is sad, but my fantasy was that women found me sexually attractive and that I felt good about myself; which at the time I certainly did not. I had no girlfriend, no dates, just a lot of daydreams—and the girls in my daydreams didn't like me either!

There are many old wives' tales concerning masturbation. Do that and—- (a) "You'll go blind," (b) "You'll grow hair on your palms," (c) "You'll go insane," (dj "You'll wear it out," and, a personal favorite, (e) "You'll use it all up!" are just some of the horror stories adolescents have been threatened with over the years. All are true, and I've got the glasses, hairy palms and psychiatrist bills to prove it.

Nah, of course not. Masturbation is a healthy sexual release and, it may relieve you to know, is a form of self-gratification even for married adults of both sexes. No physical harm can come from masturbating. The only potential danger is if you come to rely solely on masturbation for sexual satisfaction, because, unlike when you are dealing with other human beings, it is nonthreatening; no one that I know of has ever been rejected by his or her hand. Except maybe Rodney Dangerfield.

Many parents are fearful of sex education in school—or sex

education, period—because they believe that broaching the subject encourages promiscuity, which means having too much sex. For some folks, any sex is too much. My feeling is, it's only when you have the facts that you can make an intelligent, informed decision on whether or not to have sex. The equation of "ignorance" plus "sex" usually equals unintended pregnancies, or at least sexual activity for the wrong reasons. Call me Albert Snidestein.

Studies show that teenagers whose parents discussed sexuality with them, or who participated in a sex-education program, were less likely to get pregnant, more apt to use birth control and more likely to delay their first sexual experience. Though many parents will accept sex education in the home rather than in the schools, not all are qualified to teach: In a Zero Population Growth survey, nearly half the adult males and 38 percent of the adult females didn't know when a woman was most likely to get pregnant. I guess that the women respondents were mothers. And everybody's different. Some parents who want to discuss sex may be just too embarrassed.

Many parents' solution to the issue of teen sex education is not to discuss the subject at all. Brilliant! According to a survey, 45 percent of the kids polled said that their parents taught them nothing. But even in the one of three schools where there is a sex-education program, the quality and thoroughness of the education is questionable. Only a third inform teenagers about birth control, which is one reason fewer than one in five teenagers know anything about it. It doesn't take a scientist to know that has something to do with the over 1.1 million teen pregnancies per year.

The most accessible—and inaccurate—sex information source is your friends and their street talk. Whether they admit it or not, teenagers are in competition with one another sexually. Which girl "blossomed" first? Who was the first boy to grow a mustache (even if it looked like it was penciled in)? Who went "all the way" first? Often, and sadly, there is a race among members of both sexes to see who loses their virginity first

So it's hard to get a straight answer, since usually everybody exaggerates about experiences and expertise. No one wants to appear ignorant of sexuality, sexual techniques or sexual terminology. I remember once discussing the subject with my best friend, who kept using the word *lay* as a slang for sexual intercourse. I had no idea what he was talking about. Lay her? Lay her down? Lay her out? Wha-?

And I repeatedly used the word *screw,* which *he* didn't understand in its sexual context. Screw her? With a screwdriver? We talked for hours, probably never comprehending **a** word the other said, until finally I asked sheepishly, "Could you tell me what *lay* means?"

"Okay. But only if you tell me what *screw* means."

"Deal!"

When it comes to sex, people lie. Even adults. When a member of a group asks, "Did ya ever engage in [some sexual practice, the name of which he or she is most likely mispronouncing]?" each person nods his head knowingly and winks. How fierce is sexual competition among teenagers? So fierce that many times guys or girls make up an out-of-town romance who always seems to live in Canada, And when you ask to meet the dreamboat, they start stammering, "Uh, we just broke up because it was only a—a summer thing." One of my friends carried a newspaper photo of actress Judy Came in his wallet and claimed she was his girlfriend. We all said, "But that's Judy Carne the actress!" "No," he insisted, "she just *looks* like Judy Came." He was embarrassed by the fact that he didn't have a girlfriend and felt the need to invent one for our benefit. (Soon you'll find, if you haven't already, that not only do people lie about sex, they lie in order to get it.)

Whether or not your parents actually sit you down and nervously stutter their way through the birds and the bees, their attitudes toward love and sex greatly affect yours. Think about what kind of messages you get from your parents. Are they affectionate toward each other? Do they express love openly? Have you ever caught them "doing it"?

In my family sex was not talked about at all. But though it wasn't talked about, it certainly was practiced, and the six of us were proof. My old man's gun definitely wasn't shooting blanks.

Because my parents were so reluctant to talk about sex, it was an uncomfortable topic for me to discuss with anyone during my adolescence. To this day I'm embarrassed and uncomfortable whenever I'm watching TV with my parents and a sex scene comes on. After I left home, it seems that my mom and dad loosened up a lot when it came to discussing sex with my younger brothers, who are very open about it around my parents. To tell the truth, some of the stuff they talk about with them blows me away.

It is important for parents to give their kids a positive image of sexuality and love. Adults who consider sex bad and dirty pass on to their children a distorted idea, and instead of equating sex with tenderness and affection, their kids may grow up relating it with guilt, abuse and hostility.

There is an unspoken reason some parents don't talk to their kids about sex and refuse to acknowledge their newfound sexuality: Because that is the most undeniable sign that you are growing up and away from them. Another reason is that they may not feel they know enough about the subject. If your parents can't or won't help you with

this, try to understand. But don't let their attitudes keep you from taking care of yourself.

Can't talk to your parents or your friends about sex? Try your family doctor, who's probably used to giving such information to nervous, blushing teenagers as well as nervous, blushing adults. Doctors, school nurses, sex-ed teachers and counselors on telephone hot lines or at clinics are traditionally comfortable sources of nonjudgmental, nonmoralizing sexual information. And while you might have the misfortune of encountering, say, a doctor who is as uncomfortable as you are, don't give up. Try someone else, or write me a letter.

Homosexuality

Teenagers have many questions and nagging doubts about themselves: "Who am I?" "What am I?" These questions and doubts apply to their sexuality as well.

Society is extremely quick to label people, especially where sexuality is concerned. He's homosexual, or gay. He's straight. She's bisexual. It takes time to really understand and feel comfortable with our sexual character, and when labels are placed too early, whether they're put on us by others or we give them to ourselves, it creates a great deal of confusion.

The so-called sexual revolution that began in the 1960s is partially to blame. When teenagers waited longer before having sex, their sexual maturation was a gradual process. Their confusion may have been the result of certain natural fantasies, maybe of an affair with a member of the same sex, but these fantasies were rarely acted upon. Now many young people are having sex before they're able to understand their desires fully and handle the physical and emotional impact.

Twenty years ago a sixteen-year-old who wasn't interested in the opposite sex was considered merely a slow developer. Grandpa would chuck him lightly under the chin and say, "He's gonna be a real lady killer the day he decides to go after girls." Or Aunt Sophie would get a viselike grip on her niece's cheeks and exclaim, "She's such a beauty, she'll have to beat the boys away with a stick!" Nowadays, with earlier sexual experimentation and a growing awareness of homosexuality, a sixteen-year-old who's more interested in sports, science or stamp collecting than the opposite sex worries parents. Is it possible that their son or daughter is gay? Maybe he or she is just not interested in sex with anyone yet. Contrary to what you hear from TV, movies, music—even other kids—that's okay, too.

Feeling confused about your sexuality is a normal outgrowth of a

confusing time of life in a modern world where people are confronted by sexual choices at ages twelve and thirteen, or even earlier. It's inevitable. Just as inevitable is sexual experimentation with members of your own sex. I recall playing the game doctor (examining other children, handing them an exorbitant bill and then going out to play golf) with girls and other boys when I was four years old. Hey, that reminds me—they owe me money!

A survey by the distinguished Kinsey Institute for Sex Research found that as many as 60 percent of all boys and 30 percent of all girls have had one homosexual experience by age fifteen. That does not mean they are homosexual. According to sexologist Dr. John Money, no human being can be labeled exclusively male or female. We all have traits—and hormones—of both sexes and are all capable of bisexuality. Some of us act out these impulses, while most do not. Current studies suggest that 10 percent of all men and 3 percent of all women are homosexual.

What Causes Homosexuality?

Although psychiatrists have agreed since 1974 that homosexuality is not an illness but simply another form of sexual expression, there are many theories about its cause. Probably there is no one cause but a different combination for each person. Environment and upbringing, such as lack of love from the same-sex parent, play important roles in the shaping of sexual attitudes. Genetics and heredity may also play a part. But nobody really knows the answer yet.

Homosexuals are victims of many false stereotypes; for example, that homosexual men act effeminate, or swishy, and that homosexual women, called lesbians, act masculine, or butch. In truth, only 15 percent of gay men show feminine characteristics, while only 5 percent of lesbians show masculine characteristics.

Describe the characteristics or mannerisms of a heterosexual person. You can't, right? You may know a heterosexual guy who enjoys dancing or who is very sensitive. You may also know a girl who's really tough or very athletic. And they aren't gay. Similarly, there is no one type of homosexual, The only universal is sexual preference. Sure there are homosexual ballet dancers—a typical stereotype—but there are homosexual athletes and politicians and rock stars. A ton of historical figures—the writer Oscar Wilde, the philosopher Plato, the artist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci, to name but a few—were homosexual.

Loving a member of the same sex does not mean that you are gay. Homosexuality refers only to the type of sex act engaged in. The emotions homosexuals feel toward one another are the same as

heterosexuals. They fall in love, have romances, and some even marry symbolically.

When Homosexuals "Come Out" of the Closet

During their adolescence homosexuals may wrestle with their confused sexual feelings. Some understand their attraction to the same sex at a relatively early age but are pushed to get involved with the opposite sex. Some homosexuals date members of the opposite sex, may have sexual relations with them, and many gays and lesbians have married. Some homosexuals date heterosexually hoping to prove to themselves that they are not gay. But one day they "come out," or declare their sexuality, to themselves and possibly to their loved ones and friends. Men usually come out in their late teens, after four to six years of homosexual experiences or behavior; women, somewhat later.

Throughout history homosexuals have been persecuted for their choice. Under ancient Hebrew law they were put to death, and during the Middle Ages, by edict of the church, they were tortured and burned. Other societies, however, have been and are more tolerant of gay life. Acceptance of homosexuality in the United States has been gradual, but to be gay still often means living a lie, hiding the truth from parents, friends, coworkers and employers for fear of being an outcast, getting harassed and, occasionally, blackmailed.

Coming out while you're a teenager is not easy. Besides being threatened by nonconformity in general, many teens are so insecure about their sexuality that they are fearful of or hostile toward gays. Or they believe, irrationally, that homosexuals are constantly on the prowl to seduce others. The facts? Ninety percent of all sexual abuse of kids is heterosexual, not homosexual. And homosexuals are no more inclined to sexually abuse youngsters than are heterosexuals.

Even with the difficulties involved in the gay life-style, only one in five homosexuals expresses a desire to be heterosexual, Most gays do not want change, they want acceptance. It will probably be slow in coming. Gay marriage is illegal, as are some sexual acts that gays (and heterosexuals) perform.

I believe that people have a right to their own sexual preferences, as long as they don't attempt to infringe on others' rights. An exception to this is if you've had any sexual experience—gay or straight—against your will with someone who's an adult (over eighteen). This is sexual abuse and should be reported to your parents, a trusted teacher, an older friend or the police immediately.

If you've had a homosexual experience—or several—don't automatically assume that you are gay. Sometimes finding your sexual identity takes time. If you are deeply troubled by your sexual feelings

or by your attraction to members of the same sex, you need someone to talk to. Turn to the Help Yourself chapter at the end of this book to learn whom you can contact.

Changing sex roles

The women's movement that began in the 1970s benefited and liberated both sexes. Sexual stereotypes of what men and women "are" and "do" are gradually disappearing, strengthening men's and women's potential for self-fulfillment. Women are not discouraged as much from wanting to work in construction or under cars, or fronting a heavy-metal band (heaven forbid!)— which were once regarded exclusively as men's occupations. Likewise, men can be involved in the arts or have a career in nursing without always provoking snickers from others. Stereotypes and prejudices still exist, but things are better than they used to be.

Because you grew up with this freer way of thinking, you probably don't recognize how advanced an idea equality for the sexes is. As recently as the early 1970s, many people couldn't handle a world in which women wore pants and men grew and styled their hair. (Some still have difficulty adapting.) Suddenly there was unisex fashions. When I was growing up, only a few of my friends' mothers worked, and most families – my own included – believed in the traditional order of husband as family head and breadwinner and mother as housewife, whose job it was to cook, clean and raise the kids. Modern relationships stress shared roles, and in general today men and women share more responsibilities and experiences.

I've always been a supporter of equal rights for both sexes. It makes sense. It is fair. If I didn't, I don't suppose I would be able to get up onstage with Twisted Sister dressed in women's clothes and grotesquely feminine makeup. I was never bothered by asinine concepts of what a man should be, what a woman should be. Quite frankly, I couldn't care less.

This meshing of roles applies not only to career opportunities and family structure but also emotionally and sexually. For years men were stopped from exhibiting their emotions; it was considered unmanly to cry. Women's ambitions were turned to motherhood. Unfortunate, when you think that both sexes possess many of the same basic feelings and characteristics, it's more okay now for a man to be sensitive and for a woman to be aggressive.

That means sexual aggression is no longer only for men. A teenage girl who wants to know a boy better can ask him out on a date. Speaking as a onetime adolescent male whose ego was shattered many times in pursuit of romance, to be asked out by a girl

occasionally is a tremendous morale booster. I got picked up by two girls once—treated to dinner, they even hung up my coat —and after years of being rejected, it was e-x-c-e-l-l-e-n-t. So girls, go for it!

4. A Teenager in Love

The physical changes taking place in your body often cause an interest in the opposite sex. Your self-awareness not only makes you curious about what's happening to you but what's happening with other kids, too. Between the ages of eight and twelve, children prefer playing with members of their own sex and often avoid the opposite sex. But usually by the age of thirteen or fourteen that begins to change.

As I remember it, sixth grade was the turning point. It was like — *boom!* The lid was off, the walls separating boys and girls collapsed, and you'd have thought each sex had just discovered the other. Suddenly parties regularly featured kissing games such as Spin the Bottle and Seven Minutes in Heaven (which I never could play—that was only for good-looking kids). I think back to one particular day, walking home from school with a group of boys and girls—guys in front, talking about sports and cars, and girls in back. They were giggling and whispering.

It turned out that our butts were the source of their amusement as they rated the wiggle in our walk. I was so intimidated, wondering whether I had a sexy strut (whatever that was), I began experimenting with different steps, trying to cop an at-ti-tude through my walk. I don't know how I ever made it home. The girls discussed it and said, "Dee, you have a great walk." I was so relieved, I didn't notice the leg cramps until the next day. ' I'd had a girlfriend at age seven and used to get a smooch or two up through the sixth grade. But then I started to get pretty bizarre-looking and entered a barren period historically called the Dark Ages; similar to the Ice Age, only probably not half as much fun. It was a very difficult time, believing I was Robert Redford trapped inside the Elephant Man's body. I was extremely shy around girls and rarely had any dates. And when I did I'd generally make a fool of myself because I was so self-conscious. To illustrate:

When I was fourteen, there was this really good-looking girl named Jackie. Two friends of mine also liked her, so the three of us had a powwow to decide who would get her. It was all very Neanderthal. The mutually agreed upon solution: Each of us got to spend an afternoon with her, and she could decide which of us she liked best. How gallant we were.

My turn came on a pleasant but windy autumn day. We were strolling down the street together, just talking, and I was acting like a phony, trying to be everything I wasn't: self-assured, witty, suave and debonair, the whole bit. Despite that, I was doing pretty well; I think Jackie was more impressed than she ever thought she'd be. Now, don't

ask me why, but it was cool for guys to spit, and I decided to capture the girl's heart by bringing up a honker. A little something special just for her.

I spit into the stiff wind, which blew it right back and onto her blouse. Panic-stricken, I attempted to wipe it off, succeeding only in grabbing her right breast in public and spreading the gob around. Sensing that she was in shock and that I had—like the wind—blown it, it seemed a good time to vanish down the street. Which I did, absolutely mortified.

Can You Be Too Young to Date (Or Too Old Not To)?

I don't think so. The word dating implies sex, when, in fact, young children keep company with members of the opposite sex all the time: going to a park together or just playing on the swings. That's a date, but we don't term it as such. If my son Jesse announced that he was going on a "date" with Tiffany from across the street, we'd probably laugh and think it was cute.

What does "going steady" mean to two twelve-year-olds? I had a steady girlfriend in the sixth grade, and all we ever did together was attend a party or two. We were just playing grown-up. writing notes to each other; we even spoke on one or two occasions, although I never did get her name. By the end of the school year, each of us had gone steady with several others with the same sort of seriousness. Still, I think it's healthy to learn to enjoy being with the opposite sex.

But it should occur naturally, at each person's own pace. Some young people are pressured into dating before they are ready; sometimes by parents who are overly anxious to see their children be popular and want to spare them the anguish of dateless Saturday nights—which perhaps they remember vividly from their own youth. And, of course, for the same reason teenagers do so many things against their better judgment—because "everybody else is doing it."

If you date before you're ready, you won't have positive feelings about the opposite sex and the ritual of dating, only anxiety and unpleasant memories. However, if there's a person your age whom you're sincerely interested in getting to know better, by all means, go for it.

After years of avoiding the opposite sex as if they were carriers of some horrible, contagious disease, you are suddenly faced with enormous pressures to pair off with someone, anyone. Despite the strides made by the women's liberation movement, a woman's identity is still viewed by some as incomplete without a boyfriend. Resist the pressure if it doesn't feel right. Never get involved with someone just because you are afraid of being alone or are concerned with what

others may think. It's not fair to the other person, it's not fair to you, and it starts an unhealthy pattern to relating to the opposite sex—because you're not relating, you're fulfilling a social obligation.

If You're Timid

I definitely recommend double dates or group dates, with three or four couples all going someplace together. Shy people often socialize better in groups because not all the pressure to carry on an absorbing conversation and to be the sophisticated, worldly gent or lady rests on their shoulders. It's a lot like doublet in tennis. Date with others, and let your confidence build gradually.

Many of my good-looking friends could not talk to girls, but I had the opposite problem: They'd talk to me (with their eyes closed), just refuse to date me. So my buddies used to take me everywhere with them, to help pick up girls. It was like gaining an assist in ice hockey (the other guy scored), only I got no credit. They called me the pickup truck, because I could b.s. with the best of them, walk up to anyone anytime, anywhere and start rapping.

I'd capture a couple of girls' attention and break the ice while my buddies stood around slack-jawed but looking cute: shaking the hair out of their eyes, spitting (goes without saying) and in general trying to appear James Dean cool—though they were dying inside. It was great practice for me, even if they always walked off with the babes.

Teen Love

Advice columnist Ann Landers defines teen love as merely "two sets of glands calling to each other," yet another example of how adults tend to downplay teenage emotions. It's as if their definition of a *teenager* is "a life support system for glands." To them teen love isn't permanent, so therefore it is not real. They call teenagers' love stupid names like puppy love and "a crush."

The love you have at age fifteen or eighteen may not be the same type of mature love you will have with a partner later in life. But teen love is real, gang, whether the relationship eventually leads to marriage or self-destructs within weeks. Puppy love? That's for cocker spaniels. In fact, because you're experiencing love for the first time, your feelings may be even more intense. How many rock & roll love songs have been written about first loves, about the way your hands tremble and the pounding you feel in your heart—not to mention your pants, if you're a guy.

There's a certain innocence about two teenagers falling in love for the first time, and your first love will forever hold a special place in

your heart. I certainly remember my first steady girlfriend. She was a transfer student, and I caught my first glimpse of her in choir. "See that girl?" I said to the kid on my right, nudging him in the ribs. "I'm going to go out with her." It was that simple. My mind was made up. Well, it wasn't that simple. She thought I was nice but kind of goofy-looking. What else was new? Plus, she had a college-age steady. At first we were just friends, but I kept working on her, and eventually she dumped Joe College for yours truly, Joe High School.

I was ecstatic and, I was convinced, deeply in love. As we strolled down the street, we were serenaded by the sound of pneumatic drills, little old ladies smiled at us, men doffed their hats, birds sang—all that romantic stuff you see in old-time movies. Looking back, our attraction was largely physical. We said "I love you" to each other but didn't really know what love was. Yet it sure seemed real. I even announced to my father that we would get married someday, which I suppose he found rather humorous. We broke up shortly after high school graduation, and my father has never let me live it down.

When I met my wife-to-be, Suzette, I understood the difference between physical love and a deeper, spiritual love. It didn't develop right away, however. While for me it was love at first sight, for Suzette it was *loathe* at first sight. When she saw me at a Long Island club where Twisted Sister was playing, she never, ever suspected that one day I would be her husband. Neither did any of her family.

I was pretty full of myself at the time, playing macho dude, rock-star stud to the hilt. With a lot of women it worked, but Suzette could not have been less impressed, which made her all the more appealing to me. It was like that famous Groucho Marx line about not wanting to be a member of any club that would have you. She wasn't attracted to me but consented to date me because she was too polite to say no. At the time I figured it was because she was so bowled over by my manliness that she couldn't resist. Now, before I start running off at the mouth about true love, I have to lay it on the line here, folks: I was a fool for a pretty face. Period. Fortunately Suzette had a great personality to match. But she could have been as wicked as Alexis Carrington on "Dynasty" or had the personality of a Russian shotputter, and I still would have been there panting and hanging on her Spandex pants.

Before Love Comes Like

The skyrocketing divorce rate says a lot about relationships. Maybe people don't really know how to make them work, or maybe they marry the wrong person. Who knows for sure? I think one reason there is so much antagonism and game playing between the sexes is

that even at a young age, many men and women never really learn to *like* each other. Oh, they date, and some may fall in love, but only a lucky few ever discover that they can be each other's best friend, and that is the most important thing.

Each sex seems to regard the other with suspicion. Women often feel that men are always trying to seduce them into bed (they are), while men often feel that women are trying to induce them into marriage (ditto). I have married male friends who depend on their wives for their abilities as a lover, mother and homemaker, but not for companionship. And I know married women who value their mates as providers and fathers but not as friends. Suzette is my best friend in the world. There is nobody with whom I would rather be. When I'm touring the world with Twisted Sister, I can't wait to get back to her and my son Jesse. Without them I feel incomplete.

Even though I say I fell in love at first sight, the truth is that you don't fall in love—real love; you grow into it. And before you can be lovers, you have to be friends. The most important asset of our relationship is that we enjoy each other's company.

You don't have to have a romance to be friends with a member of the opposite sex. Platonic relationships can be extremely rewarding and comfortable, devoid of sexual gamesmanship, and you can gain plenty of insight into the opposite sex from them.

You can have a mature love at any age. The love I share with my wife was once a teenage love. I was twenty-one, but Suzette was just fifteen when we first started going together.

In a mature love, not only are you your partner's friend and lover, you assume other roles: parent, for one. When you're simply dating, you put on your best face for the other person. You're always well dressed, hair styled, on your best behavior. When your romance intensifies, you're together more and more, and not just on formal dates; maybe you spend a Sunday afternoon lying around watching football or old movies on TV. Eventually that person is going to see you not at your best. She's going to encounter your temper or some annoying little habit. He's going to see you without your makeup, or wearing an old dress that's not as flattering as your usual wardrobe. You each see the real person, with no pretenses and all defenses down. In a mature relationship that is accepted because your boyfriend or girlfriend loves you not for how you look but for the person you are, imperfections and all

That doesn't mean you take the other person for granted, which, when you have a warm, comfortable relationship, is easy to do sometimes. I made that mistake soon after our relationship developed. I got too comfortable, becoming one with the sofa. When I'd go out with friends, I'd make it a point to look my best. But when I was at

home, I wouldn't shave; I looked and acted like a slob. I looked better for the outside world than for Suzette, Now I always make sure that I look as good as I can for her, because she deserves my best effort, and I care about what she thinks more than anybody else. Both of us always try to keep the spark of romance flickering, to keep things exciting.

Even the best, most passionate love affairs require periodic maintenance. There will be ups and downs, occasional arguments. You have to work at romance, although like any good job, you enjoy doing it. You have to communicate with each other, be sensitive to your lover's needs and above all else, love that person for who he or she is, not who you would like them to be. Our love fills each of us with energy, and loving the other makes us feel better about ourselves. One great definition of love comes from the writer Robert Heinlein: "Love is that condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own." (Break out the hankies, gang.) The ancient Greeks divided love into three stages: sexual desire and attraction, friendship and admiration of the loved one; a selfless love in which you desire to help your beloved fulfill his or her needs and achieve one's goals. All three elements create an enduring love and a lasting relationship,

Immature love is a selfish love in which you're concerned primarily with your needs. Instead of giving you energy, it depletes it, through constant righting, petty jealousies and insecurities. People who love immaturely try to smother each other, never allowing the other person to grow as an individual for fear that he or she will outgrow them. Immature love usually dissolves within a short period of time.

Jealousy

Jealousy is not confined solely to immature lovers, as I well know, having been an insanely jealous person for a long time. Jealousy may be directed at another person and may have been ignited by his or her actions, but ultimately it is caused by your own self-doubts. It took me a long time to develop a sense of trust, but now I'm actually at the other extreme. I'm so secure in our relationship that sometimes it's misinterpreted as neglect Confusing, huh? You bet.

The Best Part of Breaking Up

Surprise, surprise: There is none. Just as adults tend to trivialize teenage love affairs, they often dismiss the pain of a broken heart with an offhand, "Oh, you'll get over it. I know—let's go shopping," or "I know—let's toss around the ol' pigskin." Getting rejected hurts, believe

me, especially for the first time.

The girl was my first steady, the transfer student. Our relationship wasn't always perfect, but we had grown closer together, and our personalities seemed to intertwine. One reason for that, however, was her determination to change me. Immature love indeed. She influenced me to dress differently, to wear my hair differently.

After high school she went to an out-of-town college, I stayed on Long Island, and within weeks we began to drift apart. I could hear it in her voice when we spoke on the phone. Teenagers change along with their environment, and, boy, did she change. When we saw each other again, it was like being with a different person. Without telling me, she'd cut her once-long hair into a shorter, conservative style, while mine was growing. Her first comment to me was, "What's with those shoes and those pants?" They were clothes she had bought me!

Then she attacked the qualities she liked in me at first "What's with that jewelry? And what's with that hair? You should get it cut." Now, my hair was no longer just hair to me, it was a way of life, and I was not about to snip off one straggly strand. I remember trudging home feeling extremely disenchanted and hurt. She wasn't just rejecting my outfit or the length of my hair, she was rejecting me.

A few weeks later I received the inevitable breakup letter. Of course, now I know that it was really for the best. But to be told “I don't love you anymore" can be shattering to a person. The breakup of a romance touches off many emotions: hurt, a feeling of abandonment, but also confusion, because you don't always receive an answer about why the other person fell out of love; Teenagers especially change their feelings abruptly.

When a relationship breaks up, it's almost the same as lamenting a death. You grieve for the loss of the other person, for yourself and for the relationship itself. It is okay to mourn. Until you do, you won't be able to accept the reality, let go and get on with your life. Be honest with yourself, though. Are you feeling sadness or self-pity? Even grief and hurt are relatively new emotions, and sometimes you can wallow in them, to experience them just as you did love.

People often imitate behavior they've seen in films and on TV and react to a crisis the way they think they're supposed to. Each person has his own method of coping. Some prefer being alone, to collect their thoughts and regain their strength before moving on with their lives. Others need to surround themselves with friends. Do whatever feels right to you.

Even the most painful episodes can be learning experiences. Without obsessing over the breakup, analyze it. Learn what you can about yourself and why the relationship soured, so that you can make your next romance better. You can't pin all the blame on one person,

and to simply say "It wasn't my fault" is foolish. You'll only repeat those mistakes next time.

There was a point in our relationship when Suzette nearly left me, and with good cause. I had gone from being Danny Snider the wimp—slopped on by others, with no backbone—to Dee Snider, a person who did the stepping. I was so fed up with feeling hurt that I made a conscious decision to make myself harder and harder, until eventually I felt nothing at all. I alienated myself from my friends, my band, my family and, finally even Suzette. I was as unmovable as rock, and she was miserable.

Finally one day, after four years of going out together, she said “I'm leaving”

“What!?”

“You're no longer the person I fell in love with. When I met you I wasn't physically attracted to you at all. Your only redeem tag quality was that you were a nice person. You're not nice anymore, and I'm out of here."

The shock of losing the thing most precious to me forced me to take a good, hard look at myself, and I realized how right she was. I'd become a monster. If I didn't want to lose her, I had to make some serious personality adjustments, which I needed to do for my sake as well. Luckily, I did.

Once you examine the failed romance and mourn for it, bury it. You don't want to be like a friend of mine, who obsessed over an ex-girlfriend to the point where for five years he wouldn't date anybody else. He even trailed her from state to state, harassing her. Try not to preoccupy yourself with what you or your ex might have done wrong. And don't romanticize that person. When you do, you give them authority and power over your life that no one should have.

Breakups are usually for the best, although that's the last thing you want to hear after going through one. You're so convinced your one-time sweetheart was the love of your life, you're considering selling all your worldly possessions and joining the Moonies. Can we talk? Trust me here. If the relationship was meant to be, it would have endured. And you are going to be okay. Once you resume dating, though, try to avoid comparing a new relationship to the old. Your memories are based on experiences and trust that took time to develop, and past experiences tend to look better in hindsight than they really were. Remember: that relationship had to start somewhere, without the ghost of an old romance hovering in the background.

The Other Shoe

Being the one to end a relationship isn't easy either. You should

never feel obligated to return affection or to remain in a relationship just because it is expected of you. Honest, good feelings have got to exist between both people.

Ending a romance should never be used as an excuse to treat the other person cruelly. Some people, however, do so either to impress their friends or to give what they once got, out of revenge for a past hurt. Just remember what the group Ratt once sang: "What goes around comes around." Believe it. When you break up with someone, be honest but compassionate. Don't offer false hope by saying, "Maybe we'll try again after we go out with others" if you don't mean it. Don't get too physical with the other person, because that gives them a contradictory message – hugging and kissing are usually equated with "I want you," not "I don't want you anymore."

Accept that in a romantic breakup both parties are going to get bruised. If you can remain friends, that's great, but I believe it rarely happens. Obviously it depends on the nature of the breakup and the length and intensity of the relationship. I always found it difficult to remain friends with ex-girlfriends, but there's no harm in trying. Still, I recommend that you give each other a bit of time apart first, and let each person's emotions cool and wounds heal.

Teenage marriage

I was positive that my high school sweetheart was the gin I would marry and spend the rest of my life with. After all, we had been going steady for a *whole* year. Not three, six or nine months. *Twelve* months. An eternity. Luckily we broke up long before we ever got near an altar.

When my wife and I began dating, Suzette said to me, "The first guy I go out with for a year is the one I'm going to marry." To her, then, one year was such a "long" time, because her previous longest relationship had been all of three months. On our first anniversary together, I turned to her, grinned and said, "So, where are we going to hold the reception?"

She snapped, “I didn't say a year! Oh, I did? How silly of me." A year wasn't quite as long as she'd thought it was—especially with me as the prospective spouse.

All high schools have their couples. "Mr. and Mrs. Anytown High." Centuries from now Mount Rushmore, the Grand Canyon and the Washington Monument may cease to exist, but Patty and Paul will still be making out under the bleachers. When class couples start talking of marriage after graduation, sometimes it's for no other reason than it seems like the logical progression from dating and a steady relationship. Besides, everybody expects them to get married.

Most people marry, but few really understand it. They ooh and ahh over the bride's gown, the flowers and the groom's nervousness. It all seems so beautiful, just like a fairytale. Romance is beautiful, and you couldn't have love or marriages without it, but you cannot live on romance alone. It's weird how young lovers often see themselves as Romeos and Juliets but conveniently forget what happened to those two.

Nearly nine of ten teen marriages end in divorce within just five years. This may seem like an exaggerated figure, but when I think back to what I was and what I wanted at age eighteen, it doesn't seem so crazy after all. I never seriously considered marriage at that age, even with Suzette, because although I loved her, I knew I had something to do first: my music career.

By the time you reach your late teens, new experiences and sensations are coming so fast and furious that you think you've seen and done it all, when really you've barely scratched the surface. That may include romantic partners as well. In high school you're mostly limited to members of the opposite sex from your community only, with you and your classmates brought together for no other reason than that your parents moved to the same town. As an adult, you're going to find that the variety of friends multiplies.

Three decades ago teen marriage was routine, with nearly one in five women marrying between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. Look at the changes in you during those years: You graduate from high school and go out into the world, no longer held back by preconceptions and expectations. For many, like me, it's a new awakening, for others (like Fred the bully; remember him?) the shock of their lives. Your knowledge and self-awareness expand, but not necessarily in proportion to your partner's. During this time it's more likely that two people will grow apart instead of together.

I knew a couple that married at age eighteen. Both were going through a crisis when they met: His father had died, leaving him alone with a stepmother he didn't get along with, while her parents divorced and moved, leaving her with relatives. They both felt alone and that all they had in life was each other. All they really had in common were their loneliness and sadness, and that they were going through low points in their lives. However, what was melancholy for him was normal behavior for her. Once he began to get over his father's death, he realized how wrong they were for each other—only by now they had two children. They thought marriage would solve all their problems, when in fact it only created many more.

I'm not telling you to break up your high school romance, or that it won't be successful. But before you consider marriage, you should experience your relationship in the real world, because high school,

even with all its demands and problems, isn't the real world. Test your relationship's strength before you get married. And the only way to do that is with time. Some teenagers rush into marriage because they are afraid their bond may not be strong enough to withstand the personal changes each person will experience in the next few years. It's like trying to crystallize for eternity the relationship at a particular point in time, which can't be done.

Why Teenagers Marry

• To feel like an adult—the same reason adolescents often engage in all sorts of potentially self-destructive behavior, such as drinking, doing drugs or having sex. Being married does not automatically make you an adult. In fact, it's the other way around; It takes two adults to make a marriage.

• To escape home life with their parents—the irony here is that with the high price of housing, many young couples—if they're lucky—spend the first several years of married life living with either the bride's or groom's parents.

• To escape the pressures of the dating game—Brilliant! Now they have to face the pressures of the newly wed game.

• To have more freedom—it's not as free as it looks. If anything, the responsibilities of marriage infringe on freedoms and often isolate married teens from friends and typical teenage activities.

The Problems Teen Marrieds Face

Some parents interfere and resist teen marriages. This is a problem my own parents encountered. It wasn't a teenage marriage but an inter-religious one: My father was Jewish and my mother was Catholic, and when they announced their intention to marry, both sets of parents were less than pleased. It hurt both my folks tremendously. When parents disapprove of a marriage, many times their intentions are honorable: they're aware of the pitfalls of teen marriages, and they're desperately trying to protect you. Or maybe they oppose interracial or interfaith marriages. No doubt those marriages have more strains, but I disagree with parents constantly trying to shield their children from danger. I say let the two people find out on their own. The longer parents belabor the point, the longer it will take the couple to learn about each other because they're too busy fighting the parents.

If the relationship is meant to be, and if the man and the woman are mature, love can conquer all obstacles. Ironically, of the six marriages in their families, my parents' was one of just two that have lasted. Sometimes resisting a marriage that obviously has some problems is the worst thing a parent can do, because it only makes the two lovers more determined to remain together. Instead of marrying out of love, they marry to prove their independence to their parents or to prove the strength of their relationship to the world. The only people you should have to prove your love to is each other.

If you're considering marriage because you've got nothing except the two of you and you plan on starting your own home, your own

world, that's not the right reason. The right reason is that you love each other, it feels good and makes you both happy.

You don't need your family's and friends' support, but it helps. Suzette and I were very lucky in that respect, which made coping with our new life together much easier.

Financial problems are the other big pressure responsible for tearing apart teen marriages. Everything costs money, and it's almost impossible to understand just how much it costs to run a home or support a partner until you actually do. The weekly salary you may get from a summer job seems like a lot of money when all you have to spend it on is clothes, records and gas for your parents' car. Realizing that it often takes two whole weeks' pay just to cover your rent—forget other luxuries, like eating—is a rude and scary awakening. Marrying can prevent you from furthering your education, from taking risks in your career, even from investing the time to establish a career. It seems that with teen marriage you often sacrifice the long term for the short term.

Your money limitations affect other areas of your life: little money to use for fun, few or no vacations. Money problems can prove to be the true test of your commitment to each other; they can also ruin it. Arguments over money—how to spend it, what to save—are frequent when there are constant money worries and pressures.

Worst of all, though, many teen marrieds complain later in life that they felt cheated out of their youth and regret the number of life experiences they missed out on: perhaps a chance at an exciting career, or to have had other romantic partners. You can never go back.

Questions to Ask Yourself

If you and your lover are serious about getting married, there are several important things you should discuss with each other:

• What are the roles of husband and wife in this marriage? Traditional, where the wife tends to domestic matters, while the husband works and is the recognized head of the household, making all important decisions? Or one in which both persons work and have an equal say in household and financial matters?

• What are each person's views on children? A biggie. Do you both want to raise a family, and if so, when? If having children is important to you, the time to learn of your partner's attitudes toward having a family are before marriage, not after.

• How will you handle money? Separately? Jointly? If so, who will be responsible for bookkeeping and paying bills? Wives are as likely to control the finances as husbands.

• Are both of you independent of your parents? Parental interference can create a great deal of tension in a marriage. You both need to be able to stand on your own.

• What about other friendships? Some persons see marriage as putting a stop to friendships with the opposite sex, or even with the same sex. Make sure you agree on your degree of independence from each others.

• Do you have any doubts about each other? If so, do not go ahead with your plans for marriage. Don't look to marriage to provide

the final link in a relationship or to be the solution to existing problems; it should be a culmination of the commitment that already exists. And never rely on marriage as an agent of change. Nobody—drinkers, druggies, liars, irresponsible people—makes a change simply because he or she is married.

If you have doubts but want to intensify the relationship, I say live together first before marriage. In a survey of teenagers, nearly three of four felt this was a good solution. I'm sure some parents won't be happy to hear me say that, but I believe it's better to learn if a relationship is going to work before you are married, so that you can avoid the pain of divorce. If you're going to mess up, mess up while living together, not married, and especially before you have children. However, living together does not guarantee a successful marriage. In fact, statistics show that the divorce rate among couples who lived together first is nearly as high as those who didn't. But you do learn a lot about each other by living together.

Living together no longer holds quite the social stigma it did years ago, when unmarried couples cohabiting were considered to be living in sin ("Living in sin? I thought they lived in Boston..."). Suzette and I lived together for several years before we got married. She was very young, and we both agreed it'd be foolish to tie the knot at that time, even though as far as we were concerned we were already married. Besides, I wanted to hold off until Twisted Sister was famous, so that we could hold the nuptials at Madison Square Garden. Yeah, that's right, the Garden.

I had this brilliant idea: We'd rent the arena, which seats approximately twenty thousand; cater the food with our family, friends and assorted celebrities milling about; and sell tickets to the general public. We'd record the ceremony and release it as an album, with the LP jacket resembling a wedding photo album. Too bad we eventually ran out of patience waiting for Twisted to break; it would have been one hell of a party.

I believe in the institution of marriage. We don't need that niece of paper that makes it all legal, but it feels real good once you've got it. When Suzette and I married, there was no change in our daily lives, but there was the deeper, indescribable knowledge that we had both made a commitment and this was for keeps.

5. Sex Is a 4-Letter Word

There are many reasons to have sex, but only one is really valid: to physically express or culminate the genuine love and desire between two people.

There are many reasons not to have sex: risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, compromising your values, loss of your self-respect, disappointment and acquiring the infamous "reputation."

More teenagers are having sex than ever before and at a younger age: sixteen is the national average, but even some preteens are doing it. Unfortunately, many are getting involved for the wrong reasons and suffering some of the consequences.

A friend of mine originated the What's Really Being Said theory, which basically states that there are underlying reasons people do the things they do, such as having sex. (Although we're mainly talking to the girls here, because they take the biggest gamble when becoming sexually active, boys are just as liable, if not more so, to have sex irresponsibly.)

reason #1: To feel less lonely or to become popular—What's really being said? "I love you?" "I care for you?" No, what's really being said is, "I am desperate to be accepted." Because these teenagers have sex for the wrong reasons, the odds are that so are their partners, and so the girl who has sex for reasons of loneliness usually winds up feeling even more lonely, not to mention used. When she sees that sleeping around hasn't made her more popular, she's disappointed and worried that her reputation may be damaged. There's no maybe about it. A school is a very small community, and news travels fast.

reason #2: To show your independence from parents and parents' values—What's really being said? That it's more important to get back at Mom and Dad than to feel good about yourself. This is a hostile motive and certainly doesn't contribute to healthy sexual feelings.

reason #3: A subconscious signal for help—What's really being said here is that the person is hurting in other ways, and being loose or easy is the most conspicuous sign to alert parents. Promiscuous people are rarely happy. They are driven by insecurity to strive for sexual identity; to reinforce their sexual attractiveness to others; for men, to assert their masculinity; for women, to prove to the world and to themselves that they are desirable.

reason #4: To hold a relationship together—Wrong again. Sex is a vital part of any relationship but should not be the sole basis for two people to be together. If it is, they won't be together for long because, believe it or not, the novelty eventually wears off, and they'll find that they have nothing else in common. A boy who threatens to end a romance if the girl doesn't "put out" isn't interested in the girl, he's interested in sex. Period.

reason #5; Because everybody is doing it—Peer pressure is

difficult to resist: Male dates whisper indecent suggestions in your ear as you make out in the darkened parking lot behind Chine's Atomic Mooseburgers. While taking a shopping break with some girlfriends, one says incredulously over her diet soda and marshmallow-fudge-ripple sundae, "You mean you've never *done it?"* as if you'd just confessed to never having brushed your teeth. If you never have brushed your teeth, you can skip the rest of this chapter.

If you don't think that sex is the sport of teens—and adults— examine the terminology we use: He *scored.* And what are the classic four steps of sex but first base, second base, third base and home. (This is surprisingly accurate: In baseball, hit a triple and you'll be out of breath, and your uniform will be stained. Same goes for sex.)

I knew a fifteen-year-old girl who was so determined to lose her virginity because all her friends had, she asked her best friend's older brother—a seasoned pro—to do the job. Like he was a mob hitman. One, two, three, it was all over, and she'd lost her virginity, but only in the physical sense. Emotionally she was still a virgin.

There is such pressure on teenagers to have sex that some do it just to get it over with. How empty and lame. Where did that idea come from? I believe that most people don't want their first sexual experience to be cold and clinical. I think that everyone imagines it will be warm and special, with someone they care about. They want to make love, not "screw." Talk to those who did it just to get it over with or who were coaxed into sex against their better judgment, and you can sense their disappointment.

Don't think for a moment that I am antisex. Far from it. I've always felt that I was an extremely sexual person, even from the time I was a child. I can't say that I am against premarital sex; I can't say I'm for it, either. I certainly don't want to see society go back to the days when sex was considered dirty and degrading, an act to be tolerated by the woman as part of her wifely duties. But I can't see having sex for any of the reasons noted earlier in this chapter, especially peer pressure—you know how I hate to be told what to do.

I'm pretty much of a romantic who believes in lovemaking as opposed to just having sex, and if you are a girl or guy who wants to wait because you feel you haven't met the right person, or you want to hold off until you're older or even until marriage, I say great. Go at a pace that is right for you, and allow your sexual growth to unfold as you choose. This way you can appreciate it and always look back on it with fond, happy memories. Don't have sex simply because you can't think of a reason not to, and don't give in because "everybody's doing it." You're not everybody. Besides, half of 'em are probably lying anyway.

I think sex has become too casual. For some people it's the finale to a nice evening. Ta-dah, sex! The dinner was good, the band was good, the wine was good. And so were you, hopefully.

It's getting to the point where sex at the end of a date is expected,

an obligation. The term "casual sex" bothers me because it emphasizes the lack of caring involved. If both partners have equal expectations—that is, none outside of pure physical gratification—it is their choice to have sex. Unfortunately, that's rarely the way it is. More times than not, one of the two wants more, some emotion, feeling and caring, not just the insertion of tab A into slot B. One person often gets hurt, and contrary to popular belief, it's as likely to be the man as the woman.

I've had it both ways, casual sex and intimate sex, and let me tell you dudes and dudettes that there is no comparison. I found casual sex extremely overrated. As comedian Rodney Danger-field once said, "The three minutes of pleasure isn't worth the three hours of b.s." What he was referring to is the elaborate song and dance men—and women—use to coax members of the opposite sex into the sack. In my late teens I occasionally picked up women, and I used to get a sick feeling in my gut afterward. I didn't even want to talk to the person but just looked at the clock and hoped she'd leave as quickly as possible. Now, the idea that any kind of sex could be empty is probably incomprehensible to some of you right now, with your hormones racing, but you'll probably find it to be true sooner than you think.

There ain't nothing like sex with love. Once you have it, you'll feel something missing from casual, or recreational, sex. And like any other addiction, you'll be out looking for it again real soon. Because making love isn't just physical, it involves feeling. The best analogy I can draw is, it's like the difference between wearing a windbreaker and a fur-lined jacket. One just deflects the wind, while the other makes you feel warm and cozy and safe. It may involve the same physical motions, but without the emotion, it's just not as intense or as satisfying. Ask anyone who's had it both ways.

Even before I "did it" for the first time, at seventeen, I knew I wanted more than simply to lose my virginity. I'd had a girlfriend two years earlier with whom I'd done some serious petting, though we hadn't gone all the way. A few weeks before my sixteenth birthday she announced that on my big day, we'd *do it* Do the deed. At first, I was blown away. But although I liked her, 1 didn't love her. Come to think of it, 1 didn't respect her. She didn't have the kind of style that I like. So I broke up with her, knowing full well that in just two weeks I could have realized the fantasy I'd held ever since kindergarten. And it wasn't like I had somebody else on the side. I wanted my first time to be something special, with someone I respected and cared about, not just desired physically. As it turned out, I lost my virginity in a rather unorthodox manner. I was seduced.

It was by my first steady, Miss Transfer Student, although at the time we were "just friends." (Read: I wanted her, but she didn't want me.) She knew that I was a virgin, and one night while I was at her house, with her parents away for the weekend, she decided to have a little fun. "I'm tired," she said.

"Me too," I answered in a display of blazing wit. Then I added jokingly, "Heh-heh, how about if I stay over here?"

[Sexily] "You want to?"

I nearly swallowed my tongue. With that she took my hand and led me upstairs. My knees were shaking, and not just from anticipation. Frankly, gang, I was scared to death. She didn't exactly say we were going to do it, but she didn't have to, not with the way she was breathing! At last I was going to prove once and for all that sex was more than just "being close together." It was like walking across a bed of hot coals—as long as I made it to the other side, I didn't particularly care if I accomplished it with any flair. A zillion thoughts raced through my mind, including momentary panic: Maybe some preliminary tests were in order, trying it first with laboratory mice, rats, inflatable dolls, anything, just... help!

It should have been a memorable experience, right? But we went to bed with different expectations. I'd always associated going all the way with something special and thought that her giving herself to me totally meant we were no longer just friends. For her, however, it was merely a cheap thrill; she was getting off on my inexperience. As far as she was concerned, this didn't change our relationship in the slightest. If anything, it damaged it.

The next time I saw her was like, "Baby! Here I am!"—expecting open arms and a warm embrace. Instead she couldn't have been less interested.

"What's the matter?" I asked her, first stopping to check my breath.

"What do you mean, what's the matter?" She was acting so cold. Finally she realized what I was referring to. "Oh, *that!* It didn't change anything."

“Didn't change anything? It changed my life!" I was devastated to find out that something I believed meant a great deal meant nothing to her. I had paid a price.

Pssst! Hey, Girls

Both men and women can derive equal enjoyment from sex, though a man's sex drive is usually somewhat greater, especially during adolescence, when his libido seems to be permanently stuck in fifth gear. Teenage girls generally prefer sex with some tenderness, while teenage boys' primary concern at first is just doing it. Putting it in and watching it come out intact. Ladies, some advice from a one-time teen whose glands got the better of him on more than one occasion: Guys will do and say *anything* to get into your pants. There is an old saying that men use love to get sex, while women use sex to get love. Unfortunately, the success ratio is probably on the guys' side.

Another warning: Though they are really quite fragile, to the rest of the world, teenage boys usually display egos the size of Texas. A classic male problem is that guys think any girl who gives them so much as a sideways glance wants them. And should a girl smile at

them, forget it, as the ego sets in motion. "Man, I am a love god. She's smiling at me, she wants me, she wants *it"* I knew a guy who got slapped hard once for coming on to a girl who had smiled at him. It was because he had a big piece of spinach stuck between his two front teeth, not his irresistible sexuality. We guys do tend to overestimate our appeal.

And girls, beware of the double standards between the sexes, from which even adults are not immune. It's unfair, I know, but while a teenage boy who has a lot of sex partners is regarded as a stud, a girl with the same number of partners is still considered by many to be a slut. A whore. A father will brag about the number of girls his son dates, but if his daughter does the same thing, he'll be crouching in the bushes with a shotgun, waiting for her dates to pull into the driveway. A father may give his son the freedom to "sow his wild oats " but he'll overprotect his daughter lust short of padlocking her in her bedroom on weekends. My theory on this is, the more overprotective the father, he more of a lecher he was in his youth. "I know what those boys want," he'll hiss. Yeah, the same thing he wanted. Of course, what Dad seems to be overlooking is that the girls his son is with are some other fathers' daughters, and they're probably crouched in the bushes with their shotguns, waiting for his boy to pull into the driveway…

Pssst! Hey, Guys

The sexual urge can be an uncontrollable force at times; you see an open manhole cover and begin drooling. Remember these important words: Never let the little head rule the big head. In other words, never allow your horniness to make decisions for you. The little head, though he might tell you otherwise, is interested only in quick gratification, and he can be awfully persuasive. Why shouldn't he be? He gets tucked away in your shorts afterward and leaves the big head with the headache of dealing with the consequences of his actions. Let's face it: The little head's responsibilities are fairly limited; what else does he have to look forward to?

Men do some pretty inane things in their quest for sex. In fact, I'm guilty of it myself. I once gave away my high school ring just to feel up a girl. She was very, uh, *healthy*-looking, and I wanted her something fierce. But before she'd let me touch her, she demanded some token of my affection. I was breathing so heavily that had I been rich, I probably would have bought her the Hope Diamond just to get a feel of those babies. At that moment, however, the only thing I had on me of any sentimental value was my ring, which had taken me four weeks on my paper route to pay for. I never saw the girl or, needless to say, my ring again. Chalk up another victory for the little head.

The Problems of Teenage Sex

Teenage sexual experimentation is often conducted under the worst possible conditions. You're fumbling around with buttons and zippers in the flickering light of the TV set, listening more intently for the sound of jingling front-door keys than to each other's words of endearment and encouragement. Or you're in your parents' cramped subcompact, where just

one touch of a bare bottom to the frigid seat could send a person into cardiac arrest. As a matter of fact, you're pretty sure your parents ordered vinyl upholstery just to spite you.

If only Henry Ford had known what other, more important use teenagers would find for his prized invention. Let me impart one lesson I learned the hard way: Watch out for the ashtray at the bottom of the center console; it leaves a nasty bruise at the base of the spine. Being a tall guy, I always had difficulty maneuvering inside a car. One time my date and I were contorted in such a position that my head hung out the window. Just as I was about to surrender to ecstasy, a man walking his dog happened along and shouted in my face, "Hey, how ya doin'?" No, cars are rarely conducive to good sex, only contusions and frustration.

But then place two teenagers in the optimum love den—all the time in the world, no interruptions, Mom and Dad vacationing in Antarctica, some soothing tunes on the compact disc player— and you've still got the makings of a potential disaster. One or both persons may be feeling ambivalent or guilty about what's going on, and it's hard to feel sexual and sexy when inside you're nervous or uncomfortable with your actions. It's ironic how the very social pressures that push kids into sex can take away the pleasure.

Statistics would seem to back this up. There has been an increase in the number of teenagers complaining of sexual dysfunction: that is, impaired or abnormal sexual abilities, as in *dis-don't-function.* Males are most typically afflicted with premature ejaculation—reaching orgasm shortly after or even before penetration of the vagina—and impotence—inability to sustain an erection in order to have intercourse. Both problems are mostly psychological, although sometimes the reasons are physical.

A boy can feel just as anxious as a girl about sex. If you're not comfortable with your partner or with your decision to have intercourse, that tension can destroy any feelings of arousal, and it's an unfortunate fact that when males are not excited mentally, it's near impossible to sustain an erection, or "get it up." Also contributing to sexual anxiety in males is the pressure to do just that—to "get it up." Boys are usually expected to be the sexual aggressors, to be worldly and experienced in the ways of lovemaking, even though they really may be unsure of what to do and feel more timid than aggressive. Boys often view sex as a proving ground for their masculinity, and with all these different thoughts circulating in their heads, it's not hard to see why the last thing on their mind may be feelings of sexual pleasure.

The performance factor is one part of casual sex that I definitely do not miss. I never liked the idea of getting offstage and feeling that I was about to walk onto another, in the bedroom, to live up to some person's inflated fantasy of what I am like in the sack. I generally thrive on playing to an audience, but not when making love. Otherwise I'd be performing in live sex shows on Manhattan's notoriously seedy Forty-second Street.

Your first sexual experiences can greatly influence your attitude

toward sex. A guy who "fails" his first time may be so bummed out that he'll actually avoid girls for fear of failing again and risking what to him is the ultimate humiliation. This fear sets into motion a cycle of what is called self-fulfilling prophecy, and unless the problem is solved either through sex with a nonjudgmental, nonpressuring, understanding partner or, if it persists, through visits with a sex therapist (a person who helps people with sex-related problems), it will continue to feed on itself indefinitely.

The most common type of female sexual dysfunction is called pseudofrigidity, or the inability to achieve orgasm. Again, the typical conditions under which teen sex are conducted can make it difficult to relax and focus fully on the feelings of pleasure. It's tough to get off when you've got a steering column in your face or an old man walking his weak-bladdered, indiscriminate dog nearby. Unrealistic expectations about sex can also lead to disappointment, when the sea doesn't part and no bombs explode inside your head. It is rare for females to climax during their first time, or first several times, of sexual intercourse, yet a girl who doesn't reach orgasm immediately may think that there is something wrong with her sexually. There isn't.

Healthy Sexual Attitudes

There's a very simple way to make sure you have a satisfying sex life: Enjoy the person you're with. People are usually in bed what they are out of bed, so if you're expecting that arrogant, self-centered stud to be a sensual, caring lover, you're most likely going to be disappointed. If you don't feel positive about a person before you go to bed with her or him, chances are you won't feel any better about that person afterward. The key to good sex isn't how big it is or how long it can stay up, it's how openly the man and woman communicate with each other about their needs. Sexual communication is rare for teenagers. They are usually too embarrassed to ask what pleases—or doesn't j please (in fact, hurts)—the other person, for fear of looking stupid or too forward. Sometimes they don't know the right questions to ask or how to ask them. ("Excuse me, miss, but which orifice did you have in mind?")

Never feel that it's too clinical or unromantic to discuss sex with each other. You know those passionate love scenes in the movies, where the man and woman fall together in an embrace and make love for hours upon hours without ever speaking? Don't you believe it. All the good stuff has been edited out:

[Giggle] "Don't do that; it tickles."

“I'm not over there, I'm over here."

"Would you like a map?"

"What do you mean it's in?"

Those scenes are all carefully choreographed. Now, that’s an I awesome job: sex choreographer.

For a long time I didn't communicate with my sexual partners and never really knew if I was pleasing them or not. Meanwhile I

wondered how to inform the other person tactfully that nibbling my elbow wasn't at all sensuous, it was downright annoying. Communication doesn't mean shouting instructions through a bullhorn —"a little lower to the left! Now fourteen degrees to the right!"—and doesn't have to depersonalize sex. Why contend with the mystery? Another reason I recommend communication: Moans of pleasure and moans of pain have a penchant for sounding very much alike. Once I nearly suffered permanent injury when my groan of agony was misinterpreted as one of excitement. "He seems to like this. I'll do it again!" *"Yaaaaaaciargh!"*

Sex is everywhere in our culture. We're bombarded constantly with sexual imagery or innuendo on TV programs and in movies, rock videos and advertisements, and as a society we've become blase about it, which I think is a shame. Sex is a very important step in a young person's life, and you should make sure that it is something special. If you don't, I guarantee that you'll regret it. Try to fight the wrong impulses and don't settle for anything less than the best. You deserve it. (All right, first runner up is acceptable).

Taking sexual responsibility — and then putting it back

If you've considered carefully the facts and your feelings and concluded that you are ready to have sex, then you are old enough to have safe sex. That means using birth control.

Hey, dudes, wait a minute! Don't start to turn the page. This isn't just a girl's responsibility, it's yours, too, just as, if your girlfriend were to get pregnant, that would be equally your obligation. This responsibility isn't just to your partner, it's to yourself.

We may live in a sexually liberated age but not necessarily an enlightened one. Despite all the free birth control clinics across the country, the United States has the highest teenage pregnancy, abortion and birth rates of any industrialized country. These are areas in which we definitely do not want to be number one. Every year, 1.1 million teenagers become pregnant. Choosing to use contraception now can save you from having to make much more complex decisions later, yet close to two thirds of all sexually active teenagers don't use birth control. Let's look at some of their reasons:

• "We don't have sex often enough." That's a popular one. Many teens believe falsely that your first few sexual experiences are "on the house," Wrong, genius. Over 500,000 teenage girls get pregnant within the first six months of sexual activity, and approximately 200,000 within the first four weeks. Next.

• "It interferes with the spontaneity of sex." No argument there. You're watching *The Metal Shop Murders (Part XIV)* at the local drive-in, and the love scene where the male lead proposes to the female shop teacher as she's demonstrating ballpen-hammer technique to the class has you and your girlfriend pretty steamed up. The windows of your dad's station wagon, too. As the tinny speaker blares a cacophony of bloodcurdling screams ("It's Jason!

He's returned to finish welding his bookstand!"), you both yearn to consummate your desire. And then it happens: "I didn't bring my diaphragm; did you bring any protection?" You sit up slowly, and at first your head is pounding so hard from the pent-up passion, you think, "Protection? Does she mean, like, the Mafia?" Before she can answer, the moment has been shattered, your enthusiasm has wilted, and not *just* your enthusiasm, and so you return to the action on the screen, where Jason is threatening the student body with an acetylene torch and promises of a sequel. Yes, inserting a diaphragm or a contraceptive sponge or slipping on a prophylactic does kill some of the spontaneity, but which would you rather interrupt, one sexual encounter or possibly the rest of your life with an unintended pregnancy?

• "I'm embarrassed, and besides, what if my parents find out?" There are over 761 Planned Parenthood Federation of America clinics in 46 states and the District of Columbia, all of which provide free and confidential contraceptive care to 1.4 million men and women. You can find the telephone number of the clinic nearest you by looking in the White Pages phone book or by looking under "Birth Control Information Centers" in the Yellow Pages, which contains the phone numbers and addresses of many similar organizations.

Birth-control education and referrals are also frequently available free of charge through your county's Health Department. To find out, call the general information number listed under "Department of Health" in the County Government Offices listings at the very back of the White Pages. In addition, you may be eligible for free birth control through Medicaid, a medical-assistance program for those who are unable to pay for proper care. Medicaid's phone number can be located in the White Pages. Hey, am I a walking facts file, or what?

I can tell you from experience that the personnel at these clinics do not question or lecture you about your sexual activity. They are only interested in helping you prevent unwanted pregnancies. An alternative to the clinics is your family doctor or your gynecologist, if you feel comfortable with them.

• "It's so slutty to plan for sex." Try viewing it this way: You're not planning for sex, you're planning against becoming pregnant.

• “I'm afraid of the side effects." I can understand that, but many forms of contraception—rubbers, for example—have ***no*** side effects, and the other methods (diaphragms, the pill, contraceptive sponges) are practically risk free. The most dangerous form of contraception is ***no*** contraception.

Myths, Mythsters and Misinformation

I'm sure that at one time or another you've heard some misinformed but well-meaning friend advise another teenager on some creative ways to avoid pregnancy, which include:

• Not having an orgasm (by thinking about homework).

• Douching, or internally cleansing, the vagina afterward with cola.

• Not inserting the penis fully into the vagina. (“I'll just stick it in halfway, and you'll be half a virgin... ")

• Taking a birth control pill—anybody's birth control pill—immediately before intercourse.

• Going to the bathroom right after sex. (You've got to get a towel anyway.)

• Using a vaginal hygiene spray.

• Jumping up and down afterward (the milkshake effect, which I guess is supposed to confuse the sperm).

• And, finally, what is known as the Sir Isaac Newton method — performing sexual intercourse while standing up, in the hope that gravity will prevent Mr. Sperm from reaching his intended destination, Ms. Egg.

When I was first having sex, I felt safe using the withdrawal method, which is where the male pulls out his penis just before ejaculating. In other words, "no deposit, no return" or "A small mess now prevents a big mess later." I had no idea that seminal fluids containing active sperm are released prior to ejaculation, and I was extremely lucky that a pregnancy did not occur. Just call me brain dead.

The scary thing is, ol' brain dead here knew more about birth control than most people my age. Now that we've discussed the wrong ways of contraception, let's talk about the right ways, their effectiveness and their ease of use.

• The birth control pill is the most effective and least problematic form of contraception; there's nothing to insert or apply, and it doesn't spoil the moment. Each pill contains synthetic or chemically produced hormones of estrogen and progestogen. Basically, what it does is to prevent ovulation.

For a number of years after the pill was introduced in 1960, some women suffered from side effects such as tenderness and swelling of the breasts, headaches, painful periods and acne, but over the years it has been refined so that the side effects are now fewer and milder. Before starting on the pill, all girls should have a breast and pelvic examination and a Papanicolaou, or Pap smear, to check for cervical cancer. Both procedures are painless and are routinely performed at birth control centers.

One final word on the pill. Yes, it is 99 percent effective, but only if taken as directed, and that means ***every*** day. I've heard of girls missing a day and taking two the next day to compensate, which is like a driver running a traffic signal and stopping twice at the next one. No good.

• The diaphragm is a bowl-shape device made of soft rubber that the woman can insert in her vagina up to an hour prior to intercourse. Used in conjunction with spermicidal jellies or foams, it is 98 percent effective; when used alone, only 82 percent, because of the

way a woman's cervix—the narrow outer end of the uterus—expands during intercourse. It cannot be felt during sexual activity, is relatively simple to use and has to be replaced only about once every twelve months or twelve thousand uses, whichever comes first. Diaphragms must be specially fitted, and you must see a doctor to get one. Do not use a friend's—that's like swapping eyeglasses—and never use your own if it appears to be ripped or has even the smallest pinhole in it. Following sex the diaphragm should not be removed for eight hours; neither should the woman douche. (Especially not with cola.)

• Contraceptive sponges, which contain a spermicidal agent, are first dampened and then inserted in the vagina, much like a tampon, up to twenty-four hours before intercourse. This method, however, is only between 75% and 85% effective. Before we continue, a joke: Q.: Why didn't the dumb girl use the sponge? A.: It was too hard to swallow.

• Partial (between 60% and 80% effective, or, in other words, too risky) forms of contraception include douching after intercourse; using foams and jellies alone; inserting contraceptive suppositories, tablets of spermicide that liquefy, coat the cervix and block the sperm; and the especially risky rhythm method, which involves an extremely careful tabulation of a girl's ovulation. Unless you're a rocket scientist, this method is not recommended.

• The morning-after pill, available by prescription only, should be used solely in emergencies such as rape. When taken up to seventy-two hours after intercourse, it basically prevents the fertilized egg from attaching itself to the uterus. Its side effects include nausea, vomiting and altering the menstrual cycle, and its safety has yet to be fully substantiated.

Now it's the guys' turn. "Who, me?" Yes, you! Medical science has yet to devise a marketable male birth control pill, leaving men with only the much-maligned prophylactic, or condom, also known as a bag, balloon, rubber and skin, to name a few. Butt of countless jokes ("Having sex while wearing a rubber is like picking your nose with a glove"), condoms are animal-membrane or latex sheaths that slide over the penis and trap the semen.

The disadvantages of a prophylactic—besides trying to spell it —include a slight desensitizing of the penis, some women claim they don't like the way it feels, and, of course, having to put it on can disrupt foreplay, the sexual caressing that often leads up to intercourse. Then there's also the embarrassment of having to purchase them in a drugstore, which usually goes something like this: "Uh, I'll take six combs, some bubblegum, *apackageofrubbers* and two lip balms." (Nowadays, more and more drugstores are putting condoms on the regular aisle displays.) But besides preventing pregnancy 85 percent of the time—and even more when used with a spermicidal jelly, cream or foam—-condoms provide protection against venereal disease (more about that later on) and make for awesome water balloons.

Whose Responsibility Is It?

Whoever is having sex, that's who. Since most teenage couples don't communicate with each other about sex, I say that both men and

women should take the responsibility. Guys, always have a condom handy. And girls, ask—no, tell—your boyfriend to accompany you to a local birth control clinic, so that you can both learn about contraception and select the type that you feel most comfortable with. If he won't go, or if you don't have a steady, drag a girlfriend along or go by yourself. Just call, make an appointment and go! Not after your first time, but before.

If your lover won't help you, it's all the more reason for you to take the initiative. If he refuses to cooperate now, how responsible and supportive do you think he's going to be if you were to get pregnant? (Frankly, I'd dump the jerk.) When I was single I always tried to be the type of guy who took his equal share of sexual responsibility, but the reality is that many guys don't take the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy seriously or they callously slough off birth control as "her problem."

"I think I'm pregnant"

You've been feeling strange lately: tired, frequently nauseous, your breasts are swollen and sore, you're irritable and your appetite seems to have changed. You missed your monthly period or it was unusually light, and you're seriously worried that you have just joined the ranks of the one in ten junior high and high school girls who gets pregnant each year.

The first thing to do is find out whether there's any reason for getting upset—by having a pregnancy test. A missed period is not a guaranteed sign of pregnancy, nor is it the only sign. To further confuse matters, some girls continue menstruating during their pregnancy. You can receive free pregnancy tests and pelvic exams through a number of organizations, both those that provide abortions (such as Planned Parenthood Federation of America) and those that advocate abortion alternatives, such as Birthright, Inc. Lucky for you, I just happen to have all the pertinent info about these organizations and their services on me; refer to the Help Yourself chapter at the back of this book. Your questions about the symptoms of pregnancy can also be answered by members of the National Abortion Federation's toll-free hotline: (800) 772-9100; In Washington, D.C.: (202) 548-6090.

If you have even the slightest suspicion that you may be pregnant, call one of these organizations immediately before you drive yourself crazy with worry. They'll arrange for you to come in for the pelvic exam and pregnancy test, the results of which can be determined within just two to three days. Discretion is these clinics' middle name. In other words, they won't say nuthin'.

If your pregnancy test comes back negative, indicating that you are not pregnant, a counselor will discuss methods of birth control with you if you aren't already using any. If you are using

contraception, the counselor will discuss with you what went wrong. If your test comes back positive, you have some important decisions to make. This is why it is vital that you be tested for pregnancy the minute you suspect you may be pregnant, so that you don't have to make a hasty decision.

Your options are either to have an abortion, a surgical procedure that ends the pregnancy; or to have the baby and either keep it or give it up for adoption or temporary foster care. We'll examine in detail each of these choices.

Approximately 33 percent to 40 percent of all teenage girls choose abortion. Of those who decide to give birth, the majority keep their babies. Your decision requires a great deal of consideration. You must reconcile what is best for your future with your moral beliefs. Wait until the initial shock has worn off and you've had ample time to think about the pros and cons of each alternative before making your decision.

You can discuss this situation with your boyfriend and, possibly, with your parents, but ultimately the choice is yours. No one — neither your parents nor the father—can force you to have a baby, just as no one can force you into having an abortion against your will. Abortion is an emotion-charged subject, and each person's beliefs are highly personal. Make sure that your decision is your own and not influenced by what others think. Do what is in your best interest and corresponds to your personal beliefs. You have to live with your choice, no one else.

Abortion, or pregnancy termination

Abortion is the deliberate expulsion, or forcing out, of a fetus before it is mature enough to live on its own. There are three methods by which to induce abortion. The most common is the vacuum aspiration, or suction curettage. It is performed safely in a doctor's office or clinic sometime between the seventh and tenth weeks of pregnancy and requires no hospitalization. Through the vagina, the physician inserts into the woman's uterus a small tube that is attached at the other end to an aspirator—a machine that uses suction to empty the contents of the uterus.

The procedure takes roughly ten minutes and can be uncomfortable. It's done under general or local anesthesia. Some women experience menstrual-type cramping during and up to one hour after the abortion, and vaginal bleeding may occur as well.

The second type of abortion is performed less than 10 percent of the time and only when a woman is in the second trimester (thirteen to twenty-four weeks) of her pregnancy. This procedure, called a dilatation and evacuation (D&E), can also be done in most clinics or doctors' offices and involves both suction and the physician using a surgical tool called a forceps (similar to a tweezer) to remove any fetal parts that are too large to pass through the suction tube. It takes from ten to thirty minutes, may require anesthesia, and the woman is often given medication to help relieve the temporary pain.

In fewer than 3 percent of all abortions, when the woman is over

sixteen weeks pregnant, the physician chemically induces labor, and the patient expels the fetus, as if she were giving birth.

Following an abortion, the woman is monitored briefly for blood pressure and heart rate and to observe any abnormal bleeding or extreme discomfort. Medication may be prescribed, and a follow-up visit and counseling session are scheduled in two to four weeks. Don't be dumb and not return to the clinic. You'll be giving up an opportunity to discuss the feelings you may have after the abortion and to be instructed on birth control so that you don't get pregnant again.

It is typical for a girl to feel a sense of loss and to act weepy or sad for a few days or weeks afterward. Her boyfriend, too, may feel bummed out. This doesn't mean that you made the wrong decision, just that you're aware and sensitive enough to realize the magnitude of that decision.

Is Abortion Dangerous?

Until the Supreme Court's controversial 1973 decision that declared government could not obstruct a woman's right to abortion, tens of thousands of girls and women died or suffered serious medical problems from self-inflicted abortions or ones performed by unqualified abortionists working in unsanitary conditions.

Just one year after it was legalized, deaths from abortion dropped by nearly half. Today it is one of the safest surgical procedures. In fact, it is far safer than childbirth. Only 3 percent of women who have an abortion performed during the first trimester experience such relatively minor complications as blood clotting in the uterus, infections, a torn or perforated uterus, excessive bleeding or incomplete abortion. Complications from abortions performed during the second trimester are slightly higher.

According to the National Abortion Federation, if, after an abortion, you discover any of the following symptoms, contact the abortion facility immediately:

- Severe pain.
- Chill or fever with an oral temperature of 100..4 degrees or more.
- Bleeding heavier than the heaviest day of your normal mensrtual period or that saturates more than one sanitary pad per hour.
- Foul-smelling discharge or drainage from the vagina.
- Continuing symptoms of pregnancy.

Abortion techniques have improved so much over the years that today only 1 percent of legal first-trimester abortions lead to major medical difficulties.

Where and How Much?

Abortion clinics advertise in your local newspaper as well as hi the Yellow Pages under "Birth Control Information Centers" and "Clinics". The National Abortion Federation (NAF) Hotline (800-772-9000; in Washington, D.C., 202-546-6090) can refer you to one of three hundred clinics, so can Planned Parenthood.

An abortion costs approximately $200 for a first-trimester pregnancy, about $350 during the second trimester, and increases some $100 per week after that. Although most facilities expect payment in full at the time of the abortion, some may accept installment payments. Fourteen states plus the District of Columbia fund abortions for women who can't afford them; others will pay only when the woman's life is endangered, if the child is determined to have a physical defect or in the case of rape or incest. Call the NAF Hotline to find out about your state.

If you can talk to your parents about your wanting an abortion, do so because the procedure is frequently covered by their health insurance.

What About Confidentiality?

In states where parental consent or notification is not legally required, all abortion clinics maintain absolute confidentiality. However, if you reside in Arisona, Florida, Idaho. Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Utah or West Virginia it is a law that your parents be notified by the abortion facility. In Indiana. Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Pennsylvania. Rhode Island and Utah, parents must give their consent to an abortion. Now, isn't that just brilliant? How many young girls and up with unplanned babies because they were too afraid to tell their parents?

In 1986 the Supreme Court narrowly reaffirmed its 1973 decision regarding abortion, but it remains a controversial topic. I believe it is a woman's right to make decisions about her body and for herself, and that she should not be forced by law to have an unwanted child. Speaking from experience and having accompanied a girlfriend to an abortion clinic a long time ago, I can tell you that even though it was the correct decision, it was a very heavy decision that should never be regarded lightly. Neither should abortion ever be used as a form of birth control.

Adoption and foster care

Some girls can't handle the idea of having an abortion but realize they are not emotionally and/or financially capable of raising a child. Their decision is to have the baby and give it up for adoption.

Agencies that can arrange for adoptions include United Community Services, Catholic Charities, the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, the United Federation of Jewish Philanthropies and each state's Bureau of Child Welfare. You can look up these agencies in the White Pages or in the Yellow Pages under "Adoption Services" and "Human Services Organizations. When a woman puts up her child for adoption, she is giving her legal consent to have another couple care for the child permanently. People who adopt usually want children very badly, and most cannot have kids themselves. It isn't easy to become an adoptive mother or father, either. Prospective parents are researched and interviewed, the necessary applications are filled out by both the natural mother and the potential adoptive parents, and finally a state court hearing is held, at which time the child is awarded to the adoptive parents for a waiting period, generally of six months to one year, Both parties are permitted to change their minds during this time, although that rarely happens. Then at the end of the waiting period, the child officially becomes the responsibility of the adoptive parents and the natural mother ceases to have any rights to the child.

Few teenage girls opt for adoption. Some consider foster care as an alternative until such time as they are able to care for their child properly—perhaps finish high school and begin a career. In a foster program the child remains with a foster family for a period of as long as three to four years and is then returned to the mother. As you might imagine, the separation can be difficult for both the mother and the child, and even fewer teenagers place their babies in foster homes than put them up for adoption. This does not mean it is not a viable alternative. Needless to say, each of these choices has its own unique traumas.

Having and keeping a baby

lust as teenagers may foolishly have sex, some decide to go ahead and have a baby for all the wrong reasons, such as:

• To get back at their parents—One teen counselor we spoke with told us about a young girl she had just counseled. The girl's boyfriend disappeared in a flash as soon as she told him she was pregnant. She had no job. She had yet to complete high school. She even admitted that her parents were correct in urging her either to abort or to give up the baby for adoption

"Of course having a baby Isn't the right thing for me to do," she said, "but for once I'm not going to let my parents have their way." Hey, that'll show 'em! Especially when she's up at four in the morning feeding a screaming baby and changing diapers. Give ma a break.

• To ease loneliness and satisfy longings for love—A baby represents unconditional love. A girl may feel rejected by her parents and her peers, but a small child will love her no matter what. Well, so will a pet dog, but It won't be such a burden on your life.

• Because raising a child Is an accomplishment—At this early stage of a girl's life, it may be her only major accomplishment. You bet it's an accomplishment, but so is graduating from high school and growing up. With these achievements under your belt, you'll be better prepared to take care of a child later in life.

Other reasons adolescent girls decide to have children are to feel

important and needed, to receive attention and to provide direction and purpose to their lives. Some are just plain bored and look upon the birth of a child as an exciting adventure. But will it be as interesting and will the girl keep her enthusiasm for motherhood once the child settles into an endless routine of diaper changings, bottle feedings and burpings? Check this out: Most teenage mothers say that if they could do it all over again, they would wait to have a child.

The Child's Rights

In this book and in my songs, I often stress doing what you want, when you want, how you want. But that means unselfishly, without infringing on the rights of others. In having a child, you're making a decision for another human being as well as for yourself. You have the right to jeopardize your own future and happiness, but you should consider how the child will be affected.

We see so many images of parenthood on TV and in the movies: a beaming mother clutching her tiny bundle of joy to her bosom. We see the positive side but not always the truth. Many young girls daydream of becoming mothers: how the baby will love them, how they will hold and protect it, how they will put it gently to bed and then go out partying with their friends. It isn't that way.

An infant requires constant care and attention. It is a responsibility like you have never experienced. Children are not always sweet and loving; they are frequently cranky, crying for hours on end. And they are expensive, with clothing, food, medical and other costs cropping up constantly. I remember watching the TV news with my mother once, before I became a father, and a report came on about a woman who had gotten so upset at her screaming baby that she threw it out the window. My conservative, churchgoing mother nodded her head and said, "I can understand how it happened." I was blown away!

"You're kidding me!"

"Just wait," she said, "until you have your first; then you'll understand."

And she was right. There was this cross-country flight Suzette and I took when Jesse was one year old. The kid may one day grow up to be a rock guitarist, a physicist or a dentist, but an airplane pilot? Doubtful. He screamed at the top of his lungs the entire time. Over Dallas, he was screaming. Cleveland? Still screaming. If the plane door could have opened, believe me, my wife would have jumped out, without a parachute. She was literally in tears trying to control him.

And, of course, the second we landed, Jesse passed right out. I was so delirious after being kept awake for seven hours, in the car ride

home / was the one doing the screaming: "Wake up! *Wake up!* How dare you fall asleep!" Maybe that's an extreme example, but things like that happen often enough to parents. Could you handle it, alone? I say *alone* because fewer than two in ten pregnant teenage girls marry the child's father, and not always because he skipped town. In one survey only 13 percent of the pregnant girls said they would even consider marrying the father. Doesn't say much for our side, huh, guys?

Ask yourself, "What can I give my baby?" I don't mean just materially but emotionally. I was twenty-seven when Jesse was born, and financially, things couldn't have been worse. Twisted Sister's British record label had just gone bankrupt, and I was sitting home, with no paycheck.

But Suzette and I were able to make it because we were prepared emotionally for the arrival of a baby, because we had carefully looked at all the possibilities, both positive and negative. If the band failed? *Well* I figured, *I've got two good arms and two good legs, and I am prepared to provide for this child no matter what it takes.* I'd even have chopped off my hair and worked three jobs if necessary.

Set the clock back ten years, however, and there is no way I would have been prepared for "fatherhood, especially with money so tight. At twenty-seven, I had knowledge and values to teach my son. At seventeen, all I would have had for him was love.

Now, on TV, in the movies, in the video to Madonna's "Papa Don't Preach," love is all you need. Love conquers all. To have a kid with so many odds against you seems romantic and heroic. But TV and the movies are not real. Real is:

• Babies born to adolescents are more than twice as likely to die in infancy as are babies born to women in their twenties. And the death risks from birth are 60% greater for teenage girls under fifteen than for older teens, and for older teens the risks are greater than for women in their twenties.

• Children born out of wedlock are twice as likely to be abused. For teenage parents, adjusting to each other as well as to parenthood can be too big of a strain. They may resent the child that "prevented" them from enjoying a normal teen life or from pursuing the career of their choice because of financial pressures and demands on their time.

• Only one in four children born out of wedlock have IQs above 110, and for children born to mothers who are sixteen and younger, only one in twenty. Environmental factors are the cause. What can parents who aren't even grown themselves pass on to their children? That and lack of money can make a colorless, stagnant upbringing.

Finally, look at the way your own life is affected: economically, educationally, job-wise. Even your prospects for a new relationship are slim, as few men your age are ready and willing to shoulder the sudden responsibility of a child that is not theirs.

• Women who get pregnant intentionally when they are older

have warm, happy memories of their pregnancy. Everyone should. Given the pressures, problems and possible complications, will you?

If you've weighed all the evidence and decide to raise a baby — either with the father, with your parents' help or alone—there are many free county, state and federal programs and services available to you. In general, society has become increasingly responsive to the needs of pregnant teenagers.

Briefly, these include organizations such as Birthright, Inc., and Medicaid which can assist you with medical care and childbirth classes; programs such as WIC, a special supplemental food program for women and their young children; and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), another federally funded program that provides cash assistance to one-parent families with minor children who cannot fully support themselves. Refer to the Help Yourself chapter at the end of this book for information on whom to contact for aid and assistance.

If you do decide to have and keep a child, hopefully you have a supportive family, boyfriend or husband behind you. I don't mean to imply that teen parents can't make a go of it. A study at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Baltimore showed that seven of ten teen parents eventually complete high school and that some go on to raise happy, healthy children. If you're determined, mature and responsible, and you sincerely care for your child, you can make this difficult situation work. Good luck.

You may have noticed that I haven't been too humorous while discussing this subject. Well, there's nothing funny about it.

Sexually transmitted diseases

The free-spirited attitude toward sex has been tempered in recent years by the increase in sexually transmitted diseases (STD), which has reached epidemic proportions. The most recent Public Health statistics show that every year 2 million new cases of gonorrhea, 500,000 cases of genital herpes, 80,000 cases of syphilis and 2.5 million cases of urethritis are reported, and half of those afflicted are between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four.

Now, the newest, biggest and baddest sexually transmitted disease, acquired immune deficiency syndrome—AIDS, for short —has many sexually active teenagers as well as adults reconsidering their life-style. That's putting it mildly. The fact is, the increase of STD had created something of a national hysteria. As one comedian put it, "What will they think of next? You put it in and it explodes?" When I first became sexually active, venereal disease, or VD, was looked upon as a minor problem, the price you had to pay in the sexual free market. I had friends who took penicillin the way most people take aspirin. No one regarded VD too seriously! It was even called a social disease. Doesn't sound so awful, does it? If you're a sociable person, well then, you get a social disease. There are social drinkers, so why not social diseases? The biggest misconception we had about VD was that "nice, respectable" people didn't get it. (Come to think of it, me and my dirtbag friends were neither nice nor respectable.) Now, of course, we know better—these diseases can afflict members of every socioeconomic and racial group.

If you're going to be sexually active, you should take the proper precautions against venereal disease. Obviously the best preventive measure is to abstain from sex, but in lieu of that, health experts

recommend that when you are having intercourse with a partner who is not completely monogamous, or sexually faithful, to you, the male should wear a condom. *Voila!* You now have double protection—from VD and unwanted pregnancy. By the way, I'd say that at your age the chance of long-term monogamy is extremely rare.

Some girls take offense when a man insists on wearing a rubber even though she's using contraception herself; it's as if he's implying that she is unclean. Guys, I say dare being offensive. And girls, might I recommend that you purchase a few condoms yourself for those times when your boyfriend forgets. If he gets insulted, too bad. Insist that he wear it.

Types, Symptoms and Treatment of VD

■ *Gonorrhea*—More than 200,000 teenagers from ages fifteen to nineteen account for 25% of all gonorrhea reported yearly in the United States. Also called the clap, the dose and the Jack (as in the AC/DC song), gonorrhea is transmitted by sexual contact and can result in infertility in females and, if it is left untreated, blindness, arthritis, heart disease and other diseases.

Symptoms in the male include a thin, clear penile discharge, which later becomes thicker and discolored. Urination may hurt or burn, and the urine may contain blood. These symptoms can appear as soon as one day or as long as two weeks after intercourse, and after a while they taper off. Some people mistakenly assume they are free of the disease when, in fact, it has merely completed stage one and is preparing for an all-out assault. Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the bedroom, eventually it infects the testicles and the prostate gland and even finds its way into the bloodstream, enabling it to affect all parts of the body. We're talking serious problems here, folks.

In women the disease is more difficult to detect, often beginning internally, in the cervix, so the symptoms are less noticeable. Burning upon urination usually results, and if it is left untreated, pus can form in the fallopian tubes and leak out around the ovaries and into the pelvis. This is called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can be deadly if it is left undiagnosed. The woman will usually feel quite ill and suffer from severe lower abdominal pains. Pregnant women who are afflicted with gonorrhea can pass the disease to their baby during birth as it passes through the vaginal canal.

Gonorrhea can be treated through antibiotics, taken in pill form or by injection.

■ *Urethritis*—The most common form of STD, in men it causes the inflammation of the urethra—the canal that carries off urine from the bladder to the point of departure—and, in women, the cervix. Its symptoms are similar to gonorrhea's: more frequent and often burning, painful urination; a discharge from the penis, vagina or anus; and itchiness around the genital area. It can be treated with an antibiotic called tetracycline, and not only you but any and all sex

partners must be treated to prevent the further spread of the disease.

■ *Herpes*—Comes in two varieties, herpes simplex I and II, and is typically, but not exclusively, contracted through sexual contact/ The symptoms are small, painful blisters around the mouth and on the man's penis or the woman's vagina, vulva or cervix. These outbreaks may occur every few weeks and last for several days, or they may not reappear for quite some time. Those with herpes should avoid sexual contact during these outbreaks. There is no herpes cure, but a drug called acyclovir, which can be prescribed by a doctor, helps reduce discomfort.

Herpes sufferers should keep the sores clean and dry and try to avoid getting run down. By trucks, too. In men it is painful and bothersome, but in women herpes can complicate pregnancies and sometimes cause miscarriages. It is suspected that there may be a link between herpes and cervical cancer.

■ *Syphilis*—Three thousand teenagers per year are afflicted with syphilis, a chronic and contagious form of venereal disease that can kill if it is left untreated. Isn't nature wonderful?

Syphilis progresses in three stages. First, chancres, or sores, appear on or around the genitals. As with gonorrhea, it is easier to detect the disease in men than in women. It becomes contagious during stage two, the symptoms of which are mouth sores, sore throat, hair loss, swollen glands, and fever and achiness similar to having the flu. A rash may appear all over the body or just on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet. These symptoms disappear after a few months, but the disease is still active, and if it is untreated, syphilis can affect the vital organs. In time it can cause heart disease, deafness, blindness, paralysis, muscle incoordination, insanity and death. (Of these, I think that death is the worst. What do you think?) Syphilis is treatable with penicillin, although the earlier it is detected, the more effective the cure. Sufferers should not have sex until the cure is complete.

■ *AIDS*—Acquired immune deficiency syndrome has been likened to a modern form of the plague. Once thought to be strictly a homosexual disease, we now know that it affects heterosexuals as well. It is the most deadly of all sexually transmitted diseases because at present there is no known cure.

AIDS is passed through the male's semen during sexual contact or through contact with an infected person's blood, often by way of contaminated needles used by drug abusers. It leaves the victim unprotected against various infections and diseases that are caused by defects in normal cellular immunity.

■ *Parasites*—There are several types. The most infamous are genital lice, otherwise known as crabs, These parasites are pinhead-size pubic lice that are acquired either through sex or through sleeping in a bed infested by the little buggers, so to speak. The main symptom is itching, which can be cured by applying gamma benzene hexachloride, available by prescription as a lotion, a cream or a

shampoo.

Scabies are microscopic parasites that burrow under the skin, where they lay their eggs. They can be inherited through direct contact with a person who has them—sometimes just by shaking hands—but can be cured with a prescription drug called lindane 1% . Scabies are also believed to be transmitted through the pages of books for teenagers. (Just kidding.)

By now I'll bet you never thought a life of abstinence could sound so good, especially considering that there are still more sexually related diseases and infections, the names of which alone (vaginitis, chlamydia trachomatis infection, granuloma inguinale, molluscum contagiosm) make me start scratching. And the news gets worse: You can contract VD more than once.

I am so grateful to be out of the casual-sex scene. As if there ain't enough pressure to begin with, there's also the fear of pregnancy and of STD. There's nothing quite like holding your breath each time you urinate for the next few days after a sexual encounter. Unlike working out, this is one time you definitely do not want to go for the burn.

Seriously, you don't have to become celibate; just use some common sense. If you suspect you may be the unwitting heir of a form of venereal disease, seek medical help—and start praying — immediately.

Many people are too embarrassed to go to their family physician. For them there are many hospitals, clinics and Planned Parenthood and Public Health Department facilities that specialize in confidential VD diagnosis and treatment. To locate the one nearest you, call the VD Hotline at its toll-free number (800-227-8822; in California, 800-982-5883). For additional information consult the Help Yourself chapter at the end of this book. (Just because I happen to have these numbers memorized doesn't mean anything. I'm helpful, that's all)

6. Tough Decisions: Drugs and Alcohol

Drug abuse in America has become a national problem. Consider that in 1962 only 4 percent of the population had sampled drugs, but twenty years later the figure had increased over eight times to one in every three persons. Users are no longer just skid row winos and indigent addicts living in flophouses. Drugs and alcohol are in every socioeconomic group. Not a day seems to go by when we don't hear of a politician, a sports personality or a rock star getting busted for drug abuse.

I don't smoke, drink or do drugs, which unquestionably makes me an oddity in the world of rock & roll. Pretty funny, huh, to be an oddball in an oddball business. It's a personal decision I came to years ago, and I don't like to preach, especially since I can't speak from experience. But I believe that people should be informed of the potential dangers before they indulge, not after.

The first drug I ever tried was tobacco. Tobacco, a drug? Yes, it's an addictive stimulant, for a drug is anything that causes addiction. Just ask a smoker who's been chain-smoking a couple of packs a day whether it's habit forming. Me and my friend Bill —a nerd like me, who played drums in one of my early garage bands—decided one day that if we were going to get any girls, we had to learn how to smoke, because all the really cool guys in our grade did. This was a monumental decision for two fourteen-year-olds when you consider how furious our parents would have been if they ever found out. But we were desperate for acceptance, and for girls, and were willing to take the chance.

The discussions raged back and forth for weeks. When should we do it? How? Finally Bill had a brainstorm—well, more of a brain drizzle:

"We should get a professional"

"Like who?"

"Tom, He smokes three packs a day, nonlfilters. And..."

“Yes?"

"He's got yellow fingers.”

"Brilliant!”

We had found our sensei (karate talk for "teacher").

So we called on Tom, a guitar player and full-fledged dirtbag who smelled so badly of tobacco, you'd have thought he harvested it for a living. During lunch we cornered him in the playground and gave it to him straight. "Tom, we want to start smoking." It had all the drama of two green kids walking into a U.S. Marines recruiting station to enlist.

Tom paced back and forth, siting us up carefully. "Well boys, you've come to the right place. I'm a Marlboro man; smoke three packs a day, nonfilters," he said proudly.

We decided to take the plunge the following Saturday at the local shopping mall. First on our agenda was choosing the right brand. Tom selected a brand for us that was low in tar and easy on virgin lungs. Filtered of course. He told as that we'd gradually work our way up to the hard stuff. We ambled around mall all day, puffing gently (no inhaling, naturally). Bill and I looking at babes, nudging each other. "Hey, they are checkin' us out now, huh?" Two dorks with cigarettes hanging out of their mouths.

All good things must end however, and soon it was time to take the bus home. Bill and I got off at our stop and thanked Tom for his guidance, though he probably didn't even notice because he was too busy fumbling around in his jacket pocket for matches. As soon as the bus doors closed we looked at each other and—

"Blecch!"

We threw down our butts, hightailed home and rinsed out our mouths with mouthwash and Janitor in a Drum. And we decided, if that was what it took to get girls, well, what were

a few more years of chastity?

Around the same time I had my first drink of alcohol, interestingly enough, at an adult party where my parents were present. My father was tending bar and asked, semijokingly, if I wanted a drink, to which I replied, "Uh, okay." I had such an economy with words back then. He mixed me a child's version of a whiskey sour, with a minimum of whiskey and a maximum of sour. My lips were puckered back to my ears.

After downing my drink, I was feeling *pretty damn mature.* So I sauntered back to the bar, where another adult was mixing and serving. I slammed my empty glass down and ordered another whiskey sour. Not believing his ears, he called over to my father, "Hey, Bob, you let your kid drink whiskey sours?"

My father, assuming this guy was a rational human being who would have the good sense to serve a thirteen-year-old a nonalcoholic whiskey sour, winked and said, "Yeah, sure!" The bartender shook his head. "Okay, one whiskey sour coming right up." This time much whiskey, little sour. I guzzled it down like before, not noticing that it didn't taste quite the same, and went downstairs with my friend Dickey to shoot some pool. Within minutes I was so polluted I fell on the floor, unable to move or talk. Everyone was laughing.

Meantime this little voice inside my head was calling, "Get up! Get up, you idiot!" But I couldn't, though I could see everyone still pointing and laughing at me, like a scene from one of those terrible 1960s films where they tried to simulate an acid trip: swirling images shot through a fisheye camera lens.

If there is one thing I've always hated, it's being laughed at, and inside I was freaking out. I couldn't control my body, I couldn't get up, and then the laughter. I thought to myself, */// ever do get up... -w*hich seemed unlikely at that point— … *I will never drink again.* I couldn't stand the idea of losing control over my own body.

That was it. The only time I ever have a drink is when I'm at a wedding or a similar function and it's time to toast with a glass of champagne. Even then it's one sip only.

My brief affair with marijuana happened at the ripe old age of twenty. As I said earlier, I tend to get into some things relatively late. It was during a point in my life where nothing was going right I was living at home, working on a loading dock at a Department store, had no money, no girlfriend, no car, no band. I was depressed. I suppose that I viewed getting high as a way to temporarily escape my problems and, more important, my boredom.

But as with alcohol, I didn't like the lack of control. I didn't like the paranoia, 1 didn't like waiting to come down. At first it was fun, but after a while I'd be looking at the dock, thinking. *Ho-hum, when is this going to be over?* So I gave up grass pretty quickly, I like to know that as wild and crazy as I may get. I can snap back to normal and handle any situation that arises.

It's interesting how people often use drugs to enable them to

master a situation, alcohol to be more sociable and outgoing at a party; stimulants to study for a test; methaqualone, or Quaaludee for easier sex. What they don't realize is that they don't control the drug, the drug controls them. And what appears to be an escape, which is also part of the allure of drugs and drink, only entraps them.

Besides hating the lack of control. I suppose that a major reason I didn't do drugs or drink as a teenager was that I was too scared to. My natural curiosity was kept in check by my fear of the physical consequences and, especially, of my dad somehow finding out. I imagined him grounding me for life and me being forty years old, with a wife and kids, but still not ever allowed to leave the house.

As I got older, my reasons for abstaining changed. By than, I knew myself well enough to realize that if I started seriously doing this stuff, I'd never stop. I'm so extreme about everything I do that if I did drink, for example, I'd become an alcoholic. One beer? Couldn't do it. I'd have to go all the way. Actually, I am addicted to a few things; caffeine is one of them. I can down six giant cups of coffee before noon, Even caffeine, gang, is a drug, a stimulant. My wife keeps threatening to have me placed on a methadone program, but I'll never give up my pot—of coffee, that is.

It took me a while to know that I had an excessive personality. As a teenager, I don't think I would have known my limitations yet, and as one of my favorite actors, Clint Eastwood says, “A man must know his limitations” Had I drank or drugged seriously, I probably would have been in trouble!

The effects of drugs (or: "hey dude, the walls are melting")

Different drugs cause different dependencies. Marijuana and the hallucinogen LSD, for example, produce a psychological dependence, which means the user believes he needs the drug to make it through the day. But physically addictive drugs such as heroin cause chemical changes to take place in the brain so that the addict is physically unable to function without the drug. From what I've seen, they are also physically unable to function *with* the drug. Even drugs that normally are not physically addictive can become so after prolonged use and may create a tolerance in the body, so that the dosage that got you off initially is no longer as effective. Now you need more. You may also need it more often.

It's difficult to pinpoint the physical effects of drugs and alcohol, since they are so unpredictable and at first seem to blend in with each person's psyche. Because drugs are illegal, you never are sure of the purity and strength of what you're ingesting or injecting. For me, that was reason enough not to use drugs. How can you indiscriminately pop a pill or snort a powder supplied to you by a pusher or a friend who purchased it from a pusher? Who knows what's in it?

Marijuana, for instance, is frequently sprayed with poisonous defoliants or laced with the powerful, smokable animal tranquilizer PCP, also known as angel dust. Amphetamines are sometimes shot through with strychnine, which is rat poison. At the very least you may be getting a "look-alike," a capsule or pill that resembles a particular drug but contains who knows what. Often amphetamine look-alikes contain nothing but a strong kick of caffeine (yeah!). Obviously you never really know what you are getting, and that is a pretty scary prospect.

Especially when you consider the source. Do you think the drug dealer is concerned about your welfare, about whether or not you get seriously ill on the drugs he sold you? You do? Boy, have I got a bridge to sell you. The drug dealer is interested in three things only: making money, avoiding arrest and making more money. One way he does this is by cutting, or diluting, drugs with look-alike substances: oregano in marijuana; flour, baking soda, sugar and talc in cocaine.

The drug hit parade

Drugs are like clothing fashions or pop music acts in that the popularity of a particular substance changes with the tastes of the finicky public, whose life-style and general philosophy shift periodically.

When illegal drug use first started increasing on a wide scale in the 1960s, it was mainly for mind and consciousness expansion through hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD. Wow, man, far out. It suited the times, as young people were searching for alternatives to the culture at large. In the 1970s users tried to escape from reality through soothing, hypnotic sedatives.

Now it's the eighties, and the favored drugs reflect our national mood of competition and materialism. It's almost like a counterreaction to the previous two decades. At the top of the eighties drug hit parade now are those that facilitate performance: stimulants like cocaine, which is also a "prestige" drug, viewed as a symbol of success in some circles.! Comedian George Carlin once said that cocaine is God's way of telling you that you have too much money.

The most widely used drugs among young adults, as stated by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, are:

- Alcohol (beer, wine, hard liquor, cough medicine), 92.2%
- Tobacco (cigarettes, cigars, snuff, chewing tobacco), 68.8%
- Marijuana/hashish, 54.2%
- Amphetamines (speed, uppers, Dexedrine, Benzedrine), 28.2%
- Cocaine/crack, 17.3%
- Inhalants (model airplane glue, nail polish remover, gasoline, cleaning fluids), 15.4%
- Sedative-hypnotics (Seconal, Nembutal, Valium, Librium) 11.9%

- Hallucinogens (LSD, mescaline, psilocybin, DMT), 10.3%
- Opiates, not including heroin (morphine, codeine, Demerol), 10.2%
- Heroin, 1.2%

Coke and Crack

Since the mid-70s cocaine has scaled the drug-popularity charts with a bullet, its usage among young people having doubled. A powder that is extracted from the leaves of the South American coca plant, cocaine can be either snorted or injected, or smoked in its pure form, which is called freebasing and is extremely dangerous. Comedian Richard Pryor suffered life-threatening burns in 1980 when he mistakenly ignited a container of ether, a flammable liquid then used in the purification process.

Coke stimulates the central nervous system, increasing the heart rate, breathing and blood pressure. Users experience a euphoric sensation that can last anywhere from a half-hour to two hours, although some say they feel the effects for much longer periods of time. It can be accompanied by insomnia and a lack of appetite, restlessness, irritability and anxiety. Although coke overdoses are relatively rare, the number of coke-related deaths has tripled over the past five years. After two to five years of use, cocaine can produce heavy psychological addiction, to the point where people come to center their lives around the drug. Because it is not inexpensive, addicts may go heavily into debt or resort to crime to support their habit, an example of how drug abuse affects us all, directly or indirectly.

Snorting cocaine regularly can ruin the mucous membrane lining of the nose, and to repair the damage abusers must have corrective surgery. Coke addicts who decide to quit face a difficult withdrawal, as they continue to crave the drug psychologically. They may experience hallucinations, deep anger, nervous anxiety and paranoia —a state of extreme fear and distrust.

Coke's smokable derivative, crack, has been called the fast food of drugs because of its cut-rate prices: a single dose, or hit, goes on the streets for as little as $10 to $15, putting it in reach of school-age kids. Equal opportunity for all—is this a great country, or what?

Dealers make crack by combining coke with baking soda and water to produce a sort of paste, which hardens and is then cut into chips that look like soap. (Hmm, maybe we should illegalize baking soda.) Crack is considered to be the most addictive drug known to man, multiplying the dangers of coke from five to ten times. The cocaine powder may be only 15 percent to 30 percent cocaine and the rest adulterants, but crack is 75 percent to 95 percent pure. Furthermore, because it enters the bloodstream through the lungs, it reaches the brain in seconds and is almost instantly addictive: Just like with coke, the user experiences a euphoric high, but it lasts only between five and twenty minutes. Then follows a crushing

depression. The user is hooked at once, requiring another hit within minutes, and those $10 to $15 chips begin to add up.

Marijuana

Marijuana comes from the *Cannabis sativa* plant and was legal until 1937, used for rope, twine and medicinal purposes. The Father of Our Country, George Washington, is said to have used it for the latter purpose, which explains his half-mast eyelids on every dollar bill.

Also referred to as pot, weed and grass, marijuana is usually smoked in cigarette form. Its main mind-altering, or psychoactive, ingredient is THC (can you say this: delta-9-tetrahydrocan-nibol), which may stay in the body for as long as seven to ten days. That may be of particular interest to you, given the increased call for drug testing at the workplace and possibly even at school. In addition to THC, over four hundred other chemicals are found in the plant. Marijuana is sort of a mosaic of drugs, containing the properties of sedatives, stimulants, tranquilizers and psychedelics all in one. It is said that the marijuana being harvested today is significantly stronger than the kind that was sold in the seventies. Let's hear it for modern agriculture.

Users generally feel a sense of dreamy relaxation, heightened sensations and emotions, time-space distortion and sociability. They begin turning up at Grateful Dead concerts with alarming regularity, and for this reason alone the drug should be outlawed. (Just kidding.) Smokers also experience dry mouth, throat and eyelids; bloodshot eyes; impaired memory, judgment and eye-hand coordination; as well as a ravenous appetite, better known as the munchies.

Marijuana is not physically addictive but can be psychologically. Although there is no proof that it's dangerous, we can't be sure that it's safe, either, especially over the long term. The number of Americans who smoke marijuana has stabilized since the 1970s and has even dropped slightly in this decade.

Amphetamines

Teenagers have been known to take amphetamines, also called speed or uppers, to help them stay alert when cramming for a test or before an athletic competition. They come under a variety of brand names—Preludin, Appedrine, Desoxyn, Dexedrine—and are often prescribed for weight loss.

Amphetamine users become excited and talkative and have a false sense of self-confidence and power (Hey, who you calling an amphetamine user?) until the drug wears off. Then they crash. To counteract coming down, the user may take more of the drug so that he can avoid the crash. Sooner or later his body develops a tolerance

for the drug, and so he needs more to get the same feeling. Amphetamines' long-term negative effects are both physical and psychological. The user may become paranoid; hallucinate, or see imaginary images; have irrational beliefs, or delusions; or become psychotic, losing the ability to distinguish reality from fantasy. Amphetamines cause most of the prolonged drug induced psychotic mental states. Some amphetamine users become addicted to barbiturates, or downers, to bring themselves down from their amphetamine high so that they can sleep. Needless to say, such a cycle trashes the body.

In addition, those speed users who inject the drug by mixing it into a solution run the risk of severe chest and abdominal pain, even a stroke, which is a rupture or obstruction of one of the brain's arteries. This is potentially fatal.

Sedative-Hypnotics

Sedative-hypnotics are also known as tranquilizers and sleeping pills. Or you may have heard them called barbiturates, which is one group of sedatives. Brand names include Valium, Miltown, Robaxin and Serax. These drugs produce the opposite effect of amphetamines: relaxation, loss of tenseness, a general feeling of well-being. The euphoria, however, often alternates wildly with a sense of depression. In the drug class of depressants, sedatives slow body functions such as breathing, heart rate and blood pressure, and cause slurred speech, the inability to walk and mental impairment. Some teenagers become so confused that they forget how many downers they've swallowed, which often paves the way for an overdose. Or, unaware of the dangers, they drink alcohol in addition to taking the pills, which can kill. *Never* mix alcohol and drugs.

Sedatives are such powerful respiratory depressants, a person who ingests too many may simply stop breathing or die in his sleep. Not breathing, by the way, is the number-one cause of death; you can look it up. Barbiturates account for nearly one third of all reported drug-related deaths, and many people end up in comas or suffer drain bamage—uh, I mean brain damage. Withdrawing from barbiturates can be more hellish than heroin withdrawal.

Hallucinogens

Hallucinogens are drugs that induce hallucinations. The most notorious is lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD. Shouldn't that be LAD? I guess you can't spell if you take it. LSD's use among young people has dropped steadily since its late-sixties/early-seventies heyday, but signs are pointing to a psychedelic revival of sorts. The drug was accidentally synthesized from the ergot fungus in 1938 by Dr. Albert Hoffman, who was searching for a migraine headache treatment. He found one helluva cure.

LSD, also called acid, is tasteless, colorless and odorless; a lot like

carbon monoxide. The average dose is between 25 to 250 micrograms, taken either in tablet, capsule or liquid form. A person who swallows an LSD dose is launched on a "trip," which may last from one to four hours. It's a roller-coaster ride that causes the user's emotions and behavior to lurch from one extreme to another: squalls of laughter one minute, torrents of tears the next. Perceptions are distorted, sense of time is altered and some people report the sensation of synesthesia, whereby one sense is translated into another: "tasting" colors, "seeing" sounds.

What happens on a drug-induced trip is highly dependent on the person's frame of mind and expectations. Some people have bad trips, which may last as long as twelve hours and can be truly terrifying. The person may feel detached from, or outside, his body. It's rare for suicides to occur under the influence of LSD, but accidental deaths are known to have resulted.

LSD and other psychedelic drugs such as psilocybin, mescaline and DMT are not physically addictive, but they can lead to tolerance. Long-term effects include abnormal brain waves, impaired memory and attention span, mental confusion and difficulty with abstract thinking. Flashbacks—hallucinations triggered from a previous trip—can happen for as long as two years, lasting for just a few seconds or a couple of hours.

PCP

Phencyclidine, most often called angel dust, was first developed as an anesthetic in the 1950s but was taken off the market for humans because it worked too well, sometimes causing hallucinations. PCP comes in powder, tablet or capsule form and may be snorted, smoked, swallowed or injected. This stuff is especially dangerous because, although illegal, it is easily manufactured, and so users never know what they are getting. Sometimes it may not even be PCP.

The drug can produce violent or bizarre behavior in people who normally do not act that way. PCP users have been known to die from drowning, burns, falls and car accidents, and some are as likely to become extremely withdrawn as others are of acting aggressively. It is one of the most unpredictable drugs. What's called PCP psychosis—a disturbance of the thought processes—may last for days or weeks. Long-term effects include memory and speech difficulties as well as hearing voices or sounds that do not exist. Hey, did you just say something?

Inhalants

Those most likely to abuse inhalants are young people between the ages of seven and seventeen whose habits are unwittingly set up by their parents. Model airplane glue, gasoline, nail polish remover, lighter and cleaning fluids are just some of the everyday household

products that contain the breathable chemicals that produce mind-altering vapors.

Most inhalants produce effects similar to anesthetics, slowing down body functions. With a small amount, a user may feel stimulated; with a larger amount, he risks losing consciousness. Sniffing highly concentrated amounts of solvents or aerosol sprays can produce heart failure and instant death. Breathing may slow so much it stops, or the person suffocates.

Other types of abused inhalants are halothane, nitrous oxide (laughing gas), and amyl and butyl nitrate, also called snappers and poppers, and rush and locker room.

Opiates

Opiates, or narcotics, are drugs that are used medically to relieve pain but are often abused. Some come from the Asian poppy plant. The most abused opiate is heroin, which is a white or brownish powder that is usually dissolved in water and then injected.

Upon injecting the drug, users feel what is called a rush, then a sense of relaxation. Unpleasant effects include restlessness, nausea and vomiting, and when it is used in large doses, the user may not be able to be awakened; breathing slows down and death may occur.

Opiates create a physical dependence and become an addict's primary focus in life. He will do anything to acquire the drug. Also contributing to potential danger are unsterile needles used for injections; shared needles, transmitting diseases such as AIDS; drug contamination; or the drug being combined with other lethal substances. Opiate-dependent people go through a torturous withdrawal in order to stop taking the drug, lasting as long as a week to ten days, and sometimes symptoms such as sleeplessness and drug craving can last for months.

If You're Ever in Trouble

Overdose symptoms vary depending on the drug(s) taken, but include vomiting, agitation, delirium, hallucinations, fever, abnormal heart rate, extreme restlessness, difficult breathing, unconsciousness and coma. And these are the pleasant symptoms If you or a friend appears to be suffering from a drug overdose, call your local Poison Control center, the number of which is listed alphabetically in the White Pages phone book. If you don't know what you took, they can help you find out and take the necessary precautions. If it's serious enough to warrant help, they will send it.

Poison Control is not interested in prosecuting drug users; it is interested in saving lives. If the situation appears not to be too serious, they will not contact the police, just provide information. However, if you're by yourself and need help, be sure that before you call you leave a door open to your home so that in case you lapse into unconsciousness, you can be rescued. In an extreme crisis you can also

dial your local emergency number, the police or the operator. If you suspect something is wrong, do it immediately. You could save someone's life, or your own. As for fearing arrest, I say that it's better to be busted and alive than free and dead. What a philosopher I am.

Other sources of drug information and assistance may be located by looking under "Drug Abuse" in the Community Services Numbers in the front of the White Pages, or under "Crisis Intervention Service" in the Yellow Pages. For long-term drug problems that require rehabilitation, look in the Yellow Pages under "Drug Abuse and Addiction Information and Treatment" for the names, addresses and phone numbers of the drug-rehabilitation programs nearest you, or call the National Drug Abuse Treatment Referral and Information Service at (toll-free] 800-262-2463. Consult the Help Yourself chapter at the end of this book for more information, addresses and phone numbers.

I think the phone books should list all this info under one simple heading: "Oh, Shit," because that's the first thing that goes through your mind when you think you might be overdosing.

One Other Effect of Drugs

Even if you manage to avoid or survive all the possible medical ramifications, don't overlook one very important fact: Drugs are illegal, and what with everyone from parents to the President declaring war on the drug epidemic, laws against dealing, using and possessing drugs will most likely become even more severe, and there will be increased pressure on police to enforce those laws. That means more arrests of people who buy, sell use and possess illegal drugs. How would an arrest record or time in jail affect your future? I don't know about you, but the thought of being locked in a cell for any amount of time gives me chills. Think about it.

Alcohol

The most dangerous and abused drug of all doesn't come in a pill or a capsule but in a can or a bottle. Strangely enough, it's legal. The National Council on Alcoholism claims that alcohol abuse accounts for 98,000 deaths annually, through medical consequences, alcohol-related car accidents, homicides, suicides and other types of accidents. No other drug kills more young people, one in five of whom is a problem drinker.

Teen alcoholism increased during the 1960s, when most of the adult world's attention was focused on the influx of adolescent drug abuse. Some parents are actually relieved to learn that their teenagers "just" drink, because of the fact that it is legal, it is something they understand and it is more acceptable. Some even encourage their kids to drink, rationalizing that to abolish the taboo makes alcohol less desirable. However, the strategy frequently backfires.

Alcohol's physical effects are many. It acts upon the digestive and circulatory systems, the brain and the spinal cord. Your blood vessels enlarge, causing a flushed, hot feeling. Impulses from the brain's motor center are diminished, depending on the amount of alcohol consumed, causing slurred speech, blurred vision, inability to walk straight and shaky hands. As if that isn't enough, some of the brain's mechanisms are inhibited, suppressing negative feelings, which is why people who are intoxicated, or drunk, often act silly and tell the same tired old joke over and over until they're left blabbering to themselves in a corner—which is how my band got the name Twisted Sister. But that's another story.

Alcohol kills: One thousand people die each year of alcohol poisoning alone. You don't have to consume some incredible amount of alcohol to die of poisoning; all you need to do is drink more than your heart, liver or brain can handle.

How drunk you get depends on your size; the amount of alcohol; the proof, or alcoholic strength, of the drink; how fast you drink; how much food is in your stomach; and how well your body's organs are functioning that day. We're talking serious variables here. It takes less alcohol to pollute a teenager than an adult. Some people think there's a big difference between hard liquor—for example, whiskey, Scotch, gin and bourbon—and beer or wine; that the latter's effects are less extreme. Wrong, turpentine breath. A 12-ounce can of beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine and a 1.5-ounce shot of whiskey all contain the same amount of alcohol.

Drinking too much causes a hangover, the symptoms of which are headaches, nausea, extreme thirst and sensitivity to loud noises and bright lights. No doubt you've heard of the so-called remedies for hangovers, such as gulping coffee or orange juice, taking a cold shower, or the "hair of the dog" cure, which is to drink more alcohol. Forget about 'em. All are completely useless because it takes your liver one hour to convert each ounce of alcohol into water and carbon dioxide, and there's nothing you can do to speed up the process. Even though you may have come down from your high psychologically, you are still physically drunk until all the alcohol is out of your system. The only thing to do is to rest, eat and take aspirin, while you whimper repeatedly about how you're never going to drink again.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), an organization dedicated to helping alcoholics, publishes a list of the signs of an alcohol problem. Do any of these signs apply to you or to someone you know?

■ Do you drink because you have problems? To help you face stressful situations?

■ Do you drink when you get mad at other people, your friends or parental units?

■ Do you often prefer to drink alone rather than with others?

■ Are your grades starting to slip? Are you goofing off on the job?

■ Do you ever try to stop drinking or drink less—and fail?

■ Have you begun to drink in the morning, before school or

work?

■ Do you gulp your drinks as if to satisfy a great thirst?

■ Do you ever have loss of memory due to your drinking? (Did you already forget the question?)

■ Do you avoid leveling with others about your drinking?

■ Do you ever get into trouble when you are drinking?

■ Do you ever get drunk when you drink, even when you don't mean to?

■ Do you think it's cool to be able to consume massive amounts of booze?

According to AA, just ***one*** of these signs is enough to indicate a possible problem. Anyone who drinks can become an alcoholic, as is one in every ten drinkers.

What is alcoholism?

Alcoholism has existed for thousands of years. The ancient Greeks even had a word for getting drunk, which, translated, means "soaked," as in: "I was cruisin' in to battle the Persians when my righteous bro' Socrates and I bopped into a watering hole near the Temple of Zeus to grab a cold one. Well, we started dazzling these two Greek goddesses, and the next thing you know, we were seriously soaked." Roughly translated, of course.

Because we live in a high-tech, industrialized society, where people have daily access to motor vehicles and machines and consequently have the ability to affect a greater number of people, the effects of alcohol abuse are more far-reaching than ever before. A drunk in his living room only does damage to himself and maybe the coffee table, whereas a drunk driver can seriously harm many others. We have an escalating problem in this country with people drinking and doing drugs on the job. Would you feel safe placing your person in the hands of a dentist reeking of booze? A stoned schoolbus driver? A surgeon strung out on cocaine?

Causes of Alcoholism

There are a variety of factors. Though no one is born an alcoholic, heredity and genetics may make you more vulnerable to alcoholism. This is believed to be the case for over a third of all alcoholics and alcohol abusers. Home life plays an important part, too. Children of alcoholics are four times more likely to become alcoholics, and nearly half of all alcoholics had alcoholic parents. Sometimes, however, just the opposite is true: An alcoholic's family members may have been strict teetotalers, or abstainers. Either way, an unusual drinking

pattern has been established.

Today we recognize alcoholism as a progressive disease and alcoholics as people who are physically addicted to drink. An alcoholic may want to quit, but the craving for alcohol is overpowering, uncontrollable. By the time he has reached the third of alcoholism's four stages, the alcoholic is physically dependent on drink and unable to function without it. He may go to school in the morning, but after just a few hours he rushes to his locker, where he has stashed a bottle of booze. If he doesn't have a drink, he may experience the same type of withdrawal symptoms as a drug addict.

Alcohol withdrawal produces delirium tremens, commonly referred to as DTs: life-threatening convulsions, hallucinations, loss of appetite, nausea and fever. Alcoholics are subject to blackouts, which means they have no memory of the events prior to getting drunk. Advanced alcoholism brings about destruction of the brain cells, which are irreplaceable—although I think the Japanese will have them on the market soon—and a potentially fatal disease called cirrhosis of the liver. While it takes years for this condition to develop in adults, teenagers can be stricken in just fifteen to twenty months because their bodies are not yet fully developed.

If You Have a Drinking Problem

You need treatment. Alcoholism cannot be cured, but it can be controlled. Even a person who goes through treatment and never touches a drop of alcohol again in his life is, and will always be, an alcoholic. In the Yellow Pages, under "Alcoholism Information and Treatment Centers," are the names, addresses and phone numbers of the alcohol-abuse centers in your area. Or you can call Alcoholics Anonymous, which is listed alphabetically in the White Pages.

Alcoholics Anonymous is an informal society of nearly one and a half million recovering alcoholics in the United States, Canada and over one hundred other countries. In each area men, women and teenagers with drinking problems meet in groups that range from a handful of members to dozens, offering one another support and personal experiences to help learn how to combat alcohol abuse. Twenty percent of AA's members are teens.

There are no dues or fees (contributions are accepted) and membership is, as some of you might have guessed, anonymous. Members go by their first name only or do not identify themselves at all. In fact, even the founders of AA, a New York stockbroker and an Akron, Ohio, doctor, are known respectively as only Bill W. and Bob S. I'm sure glad I'm not an alcoholic; I don't think anybody would have too much trouble figuring out who Dee S. is. For more information,

addresses and phone numbers of alcohol treatment centers and organizations, refer to the Help Yourself chapter at the back of this book.

Cigarettes

If the four different warnings from the surgeon general about the physical dangers of smoking, printed on every pack of cigarettes, aren't enough to sway you from lighting up, nothing I can say here will. But have you ever tried kissing a person who's just put down a cigarette? Have you ever tried kissing a person who hasn't put down a cigarette? Ouch.

Every year millions of people suffer heart attacks, strokes and cancers, all a result of smoking. Women who smoke give birth to less healthy babies, and children whose parents smoke suffer more colds and other upper respiratory illnesses. Just a few minor drawbacks, right?

Reasons for indulging

If people are aware of the dangers of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, why do they still do them?

For one thing, we live in a consumption-oriented society. It's estimated that a child will see alcohol drunk an average of 75,000 times on TV before he or she is of legal drinking age. How do alcohol advertisements represent drinking? With very positive images. Beer is portrayed as a sociable, manly kind of drink: some buddies tying on a few in a bar after a hard day's work. Wine is associated with romance: soft music, soft-focus camera work, a man and a woman staring starry-eyed at each other as he pours her a glassful Mixed drinks are sophisticated, the beverage of choice for suave, sexy double agent James Bond. The good life. You hear the sound of glasses clinking together at an elegant cocktail party.

Cigarettes are portrayed as very macho *[deep, steroid-enhanced voice]:* "After you've whipped that grizzly bear at arm-wrestling and swum Lake Superior, light up a Tombstone nonfllter, with the taste of a Kentucky coal mine. 'Cos you deserve it." Or it's a symbol of rebellion: the alienated, so-cool-it-hurts-when-I-scowl Sean Penn look. Or the rock & roll image of the Rolling Stones' Keith Richards, with the cigarette dangling precariously out of the corner of his mouth as he slams out another guitar power chord. And for women, cigarette smoking is a sign of independence, of having come “a long way, baby,” of having gained the inalienable right to contract lung cancer.

Besides imitating the pictures presented by the media, we also

imitate our parents. Drinking is associated with becoming an adult, and when you're sixteen, there's nothing more you want than to be accepted as a grown-up. Maybe you're not old enough to drive legally or to hold down a full-time job, but you can at least fake sophistication by casually sipping your cocktail with just the right attitude (while trying your best not to gag; it'd ruin the effect).

Smoking and drinking may make you feel cool, but think about this: Both are addictive, and while you're imagining how awesome you'll look with that butt hanging out of your mouth or with that drink in your hand, can you picture yourself as one of those old, wrinkled-faced, wheezing chain-smokers with yellow fingertips and teeth? There are other, more positive ways in which to act like an adult. Think about how repulsed you are whenever you see your parents or some relatives drunk. The last time, your mother staggered around the living room giggling, threatening to perform a striptease, while your father kept drunkenly whispering naughty suggestions in her ear. Much to your relief, they finally fell together into the master bedroom. You were so ashamed that were you not such a benevolent teenager, you'd have kicked them out of the house until they shaped up.

Besides making teenagers feel more adultlike, both drugs and alcohol are often used as anesthesia, numbing people to their problems or unhappiness. Such measures, however, are purely temporary, and often when a person awakes from a hangover or a drug-induced trance, his problems only seem to have intensified.

Then there's another reason: Drugs and alcohol are sometimes part of the adolescent male's frenzied search for sex. Because they lower people's inhibitions, liquor and certain drugs, usually barbiturates, become part of the seduction scheme. In the late seventies, I knew guys who wouldn't set foot inside a bar or a club without their supply of methaqualone, or Quaaludes, which helped make young women eager and willing to go home with them; usually because they were half-unconscious. It would take little effort to get a girl to swallow some pills and even less effort to score. Quaaludes are no longer manufactured in the United States, though imports from Mexico and overseas still find their way here.

Sure, alcohol and drugs may prime the way for some quick, easy sex, but there's one hitch, gentlemen. As Shakespeare once said about alcohol, it "provokes the desire but takes away the performance." In English, that means: Ingest too much liquor or smoke, and while your inhibitions may lower, so will a critical part of your anatomy.

It's sad when people feel they have to motivate themselves artificially, but you see it all the time: at adults' parties, where insecure people need to fortify themselves with a drink or maybe a

line of cocaine before socializing. They believe the drug or the drink loosens them up, so that either they feel more at ease among others or they're too stoned to care. They need to drain a glass or suck on a joint to feel confident. Sexy. More outgoing. To "be themselves."

We live in a society that requires people to have an excuse to let themselves go. The truth is that most people need someone or something else to blame for their actions. If they look foolish or embarrass themselves, they have an instant alibi: "Hey, man, I was high" Or "I'm sorry I hit you [barfed on your rug, broke your mom's china], but I was drunk." And in most cases, the excuse is accepted.

I never allowed myself to be intimidated by others. If I wanted to dance, I threw myself out on the floor without having to drink. Today I sing onstage in front of thousands of people, braced with nothing but my own adrenaline. The same goes for the other guys in Twisted Sister. The idea that drugs and alcohol make you more creative or play better is b.s. In the past I've performed with musicians who felt they were better high. Believe me, certainly no one listening thought they played better stoned, and none of those musicians ever lasted too long.

Why is it that parties depend on booze and drugs? People can go to the most boring get-together, get smashed or stoned and have the time of their life. How? Communing with a chair and never moving the entire evening? The next day they say to themselves, "What a great party!" But the party wasn't great; the stuff they were doing was great, and the party they were having in their mind was great. They could have sat alone in a dark prison cell and had a "great party." I'm a real good judge of a party because I'm always sober, so if I leave and tell the hosts, "That was awesome, dudes!" you know it was good.

It was *real* fun, because of the people I was with, and not by a drug or a drink. And better still, I can remember it. That kills me about people who drink or take drugs in order to have a good time: They wake up the next day and draw a complete blank on the night before. Why bother, then?

Isn't it better to feel self-confident so that you don't need to enhance your personality with drugs? To know that people are honestly relating to you and liking you? (Then again, they could be enjoying your company and scintillating wit only because of the drugs *they're* doing.)

Boredom Plays a Part

A major part. For a lot of teenagers, sitting around getting high is an activity in itself, a way to alleviate monotony (not to be confused with the game Monopoly), which, when you don't have a car or any

money, can be considerable, I know. And the hunt for the drug or booze becomes a major topic of conversation. War stories.

"Like, I'm in Washington Park, right? And this dude comes up to me and says, Tsst! Wanna buy some hash?' So we go into this alleyway, and I bargain with him, and we share a pipe in this decrepit old flophouse." The reaction, of course, is an incredulous "Who-oa!" Refusing drugs or alcohol, on the other hand, doesn't leave you with any war stories:

"Like, I'm at this party, right? And this dude comes up to me, thrusts a bottle of tequila in my face and says, 'Wanna eat the worm at the bottom?' "

"So what happened?"

"I say, 'No thanks, I don't drink.'"

Not quite the same effect. But so what?

Adventures with booze and drugs give people of all ages a whole inventory of war stories to tell, about the time they got so drunk and sick, they bowed at the porcelain altar for hours. "Who-oa!" Or they were so messed up, they woke up the next morning and had no idea how they got there. "Who-oa!"

That's the weird thing about using substances: You can gain the admiration of your peers just for puking all over yourself or getting into a dangerous situation. Is that really the best story you have to tell about yourself? Where's your imagination? Approximately $110 billion is spent on drugs every year and even more on alcohol. Why not take whatever money you have and instead of squandering it on something like drugs or drink—which is gone before you know it, leaving you with nothing to show except a throbbing headache—spend it on a musical instrument, learn how to play, form a band, become a rock star, then learn how to invest in tax-exempt bonds. Teach yourself to ice skate or to use a camera. Immerse yourself in an organization, a hobby or an activity. Let that be your drug. That's what my band always was for me. (If I get any more cosmic here, I'm going to throw up. Hey! Great war story! Who-oa!)

Peer Pressure, Beer Pressure, Bladder Pressure

The chief reason people say yes to alcohol and drugs is that it's so tough to say no. Others force them upon you all the time, and it takes a lot of willpower to resist. You've heard the antidrug campaign "Just Say No? Well, I agree with the basic concept, but it's not that simple. You never can just say no. Because that's never where it ends. "No? Why not?" And then you get a whole song and dance.

It's hard to turn down a drink or a line of cocaine and still look cool, because the offer is usually made as a gesture of friendship; the

modern equivalent of the American Indians' passing of the peace pipe. It's like a handshake. And to a lot of people, your refusing the drink or the line they offer is like saying, "No thanks, I don't shake hands."

To this day I have trouble handling such situations, especially because of the business I'm in, where it's assumed that every rock musician is doing drugs or is drunk twenty-four hours a day. Fans offer to buy me a drink, and no matter how graciously I decline, some of them become insulted, with a look that says, "What's the matter, I'm not good enough for you?" Tell them you don't indulge, and half the time they don't believe you. Especially me. People have a hard time accepting that anybody could look and act the way I do onstage without being on the most potent drug known to man. The truth is, a lot of rock musicians have seen the hazards of drug and alcohol abuse, have witnessed talented performers' careers go down the drain, and are swearing off the stuff. Nobody who's quit drugs, like Keith Richards, Eric Clapton and Alice Cooper, has ever come out and described his years of abuse as something he'd want to go back to. Drugs and alcohol have robbed rock & roll of such greats as Jimi Hendrix, Elvis Presley, Bon Scott, John Bonham, Janis Joplin and so many others. Whenever I meet one of my childhood heroes who has suffered because of drugs or booze, it reinforces my decision to stay straight.

Now, once people know that you don't smoke or drink, the next obstacles to dodge are people who insist on being the first to initiate you. It becomes a challenge. Those are the three steps of saying no: one, risking offending others; two, convincing them; three, fending off the challenge.?

As the night wears on, it gets progressively worse, and the person gets more insistent. This is because people do not like to drink or get high alone. In the presence of a sober person, they risk embarrassment, vulnerability. What deep, dark secret about themselves might they reveal? That's okay in a room filled with others in a similar condition—who's going to remember it?—but being around a straight person makes them very uncomfortable. I've noticed that whenever I attend a business meeting (Zzzzz...), often conducted over lunch, and I order a soda, everyone else orders a nonalcoholic drink. If I ordered a beer or a white wine, so would they. But my being straight often causes them to remain sober. Too bad: They're so much more manageable and agreeable when they're ripped.

With alcohol, there's a relatively simple solution to the difficulty of saying no. If you're at a party where the host has broken into Dad's liquor cabinet and the guests are helping themselves, you can always pour yourself an orange juice on the rocks and nurse it the entire time. As long as you have a drink in your hand, you won't get bothered. If

they ask you what you're drinking, say that it's a screwdriver, which is made with orange juice and vodka. Or fill a glass with club soda and a twist of lime and christen it a vodka tonic. Pour a cola on ice and say it's a rum and Coke. Just don't let anyone sip your drink.

This technique will work at a party where alcohol is making the rounds, but what do you do if you're somewhere where marijuana is being smoked or cocaine snorted? There are no tricks that I know of, only honesty. Once again, saying no can be very tough. (Realize that technically, if you're with people who are arrested for drugs, you could find yourself—wrongly, perhaps— in a very difficult situation.)

I recall one night many years ago when a motorcycle gang poured into a club to see Twisted Sister. It turns out that they were upset because one of our security men had once been a member of a rival gang. They thought the group was associated with this gang, which we were not. Word was delivered to our dressing room that the gang wanted to have what it called a war council. The gang president strode in, was introduced to me and suggested that we continue our meeting in the bathroom. Just the two of us. Gulp. We went in, he closed the door behind us, withdrew a vial of cocaine and proceeded to sprinkle out two lines—one for each of us.

Now, if ever I was tempted to say yes, this was the time, because out in the bar were thirty-five bikers ready to start a war with my band and me. Before I could think to stop myself. I blurted out my usual, "No thanks, I don't do drugs." At first, the president seemed taken aback, but when I added, "Why don't you do mine for me?", he shrugged, snorted his line of coke and everything was okay. In fact, he was even impressed by my stupidity—I mean, my nerve. I was younger then, but I still knew that even if I'd been beaten up for not snorting, I was better off with a few bruises than to compromise my beliefs and to have a line of God knows what blasting around my brain. In any case, disaster had been averted.

Important safety tip: When you decline drugs or alcohol, never be self-righteous or condescending to the person making the offer. Most of the time it's simply a friendly gesture on his or her part. Sometimes I have found that the easiest thing of all is to tell a small lie. When someone offers me a drink, I'll say, "I've stopped drinking." Drinkers accept that because it means I was once one of them, except that I had to give it up. Or I'll say, smiling knowingly, "I'm feeling fine," the implication being that I am happily stoned already. That, too, is acceptable. Because I'm a singer, I can always turn down a smoke or a drink because I need to keep my throat in shape.

Say whatever you have to in order to stay straight and keep them off your back. Lie if you have to. Tell them you can't lift a few "because my father would kill me if he ever found out." It was my fear

of father, Dad the Omnipotent, which helped me from indulging. And here's a twist: I found that when I told people I didn't do drugs or drink, it sometimes worked in my favor. I stood out from the others and became unique, like some sort of prehistoric creature. "Hey, he doesn't do drugs!"

"You don't get high? Hey, get off it!"

My determination to stay straight made me an individual. Everybody else did drugs, Dee didn't. I could still hang out with people who wanted to get stoned, but I didn't have to do it myself.

Now, there will be times when you're at a party, feeling like an outcast because some of your friends are off in a corner together, giggling, swapping war stories, getting high, It's like a wall has been erected between you and them, and it's not always a great feeling. But ask yourself: What kind of person passes judgment on another based on such a shallow criterion— that you don't get stoned? If getting high together serves as the basis for a friendship, I'd say that's not much of a friendship. True friends will respect your choices.

I never worried too much about feeling like an outcast because I knew I'd win everybody back by the end of the evening anyway. I was crazier straight than most of my friends were stoned, and the average party I attended usually ended up this way:

"Look at Dee, man, he's rolling around on the floor. The guy's an animal!"

"Can you believe it? And the dude is absolutely straight. Outrageous!"

"Wow, wouldn't you love to see him stoned?"

"Dee? Are you crazy? No way, man. Too scary."

"Hey, Dee? Would you mind not juggling the living room furniture?"

Another benefit of staying straight: I always had a great time at parties where other people were stumbling drunk or bleary-eyed stoned. I laughed myself silly at their expense. Try being sober with a bunch of drunks; it can make for one funny evening. If the others are giving you grief for not getting high with them, just wait until later when they're all crawling around in their own vomit.

Don't drive drunk

More than half of all car accidents in the country are alcohol related, and alcohol-related highway deaths are the number one killer of fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds. That isn't counting all those thousands of kids who survive a crash but have to go through life in a wheelchair, without their arms or with brain damage. The same caution applies to drug abusers, including marijuana smokers.

Research shows that driving skills are impaired for at least four to six hours after smoking a single marijuana cigarette, long after the high is gone.

Every group should have a designated driver. The deal is, each time you and your friends go out, one person is chosen to stay straight and chauffeur everyone else in the group home safely, and they pay for his sodas all night.

If you're ever in a situation, however, where the driver is blitzed, wrestle the keys away if possible, or just stay out of the car. If you can, make a deal with your parents to pick you up whenever you find yourself in a bind, even if it means catching some flak from them. I disagree vehemently with parents who would yell at their teenager for calling for a lift home. I'd be impressed by his maturity—and thankful that he was safe.

Know your friends. Know your ride. (And remember where you parked your car.) Keep your eye on him or her as the evening progresses, and if things are getting out of hand, urge that person to slow down. If you can't trust the people you're with, maybe you should get out of that circle of friends, or just go out with them when alcohol or drugs are not going to be involved. Do whatever you have to do to ensure your safety.

And your companions' safety as well; after all, friends look out for friends. If it's apparent that someone you're with is drinking too much, smoking too much, snorting too much, take the bottle, the joint, the coke away, no matter how belligerent he becomes or how much he begs you not to. Explain firmly, "You're becoming dangerous to yourself, and I care about you too much to let you continue." I never tried to talk friends out of drinking, but if they got excessive, I'd toss them over my shoulder and drive them home. That's another important point: Never let drunk or high friends behind the wheel. Either drive the car yourself, or call them a taxi. If you were in the same spot, you'd be grateful for the same concern.

Sooner or later you'll find that you gravitate toward people who share your views on substance abuse. I don't preach sobriety to people, yet I find that most of my friends are social drinkers at worst, and many are bone straight. People who are out of their skulls don't last long around me. They make me uncomfortable, and I wouldn't be surprised if I made them uncomfortable too.

Life in the last lane (or: what it feels like to get run over)

When I was a teenager, I felt invincible; nothing could harm me. And fatalistic—whatever happens happens. You spend your childhood losing sleep over the boogie man and about staying home alone in the

big house with all its creaky noises, but now you're older and stronger. Nothing can hurt you. Death? The word isn't even in your vocabulary.

No teenager believes that he's going to get pulled over and charged with drunk driving or that he could be the victim of a drug overdose. All those short news items you see hidden in the back of the daily paper, about stoned teens who fall asleep at the wheel and are killed? Those things happen to someone else. It doesn't seem real. Until one day it happens to someone you know. Then you realize how easily it could be you.

Think about how you would feel if, while you were driving impaired, you injured or killed someone else. Very often a drunk driver ends up killing the people in his car. That could be your brother or sister, boyfriend or girlfriend, or a close friend. It only has to happen once. Is it worth it?

Several years ago it happened to a friend of mine, singer Vince Neil of Motley Crue. Driving while drunk, he collided with another car, killing his passenger—rock drummer Nicholas Dingley, a.k.a. Razzle—and injuring three other people. I've always advocated doing what you want when you want, but not when it infringes on somebody else's rights. By getting behind the wheel after he'd been drinking, Vince—who doesn't have a malicious bone in his body—ended a life and severely altered three others. And he will have to live with that awful truth forever.

Twisted Sister's guitar player Jay Jay French was seriously into drugs at one time: wheeling and dealing. He lived in New York City, and of his entire circle of friends, he is the only one to have come out unscathed. The rest are all either still addicted, burned out, in jail or dead. Jay Jay is straight now, and he can't believe that he survived.

THEM

Caught up in their worries And tomorrow's dream. Missing all the living, Milk without the cream. They think you 're so foolish, Living for today. Caring just what you think Not what others say.

—"S.M.F.," Twisted Sister

7. Parents and Families – can't live with 'em, can't shoot 'em

You know the savage, snarling father in the "We're Not Gonna Take It" video?

That's my dad.

Well, obviously he's being played by an actor, but my father boasts about how that character was based on him: a screaming, raving maniac, an almighty, dominating force.

In your entire life, no one has more impact on you than your parents, and no other relationship is as complicated. You and your mom or dad can discuss an issue for hours—say, your being allowed to use the car—and never hear, much less understand, a word the other is saying. Then there are times when all your parents have to do is give you that one look or use that tone of voice that says everything!

"How was your day?"

And you explode: "I know what you're really asking—did I study for my math final. No, I didn't yet. Okay? So get off my back!"

Whether or not we admit it, more than anything in life we want our parents' approval. We can live without it, but there s nothing better than hearing your mother or father say, "We re proud of you." When my parents told me how proud they were of me after Twisted Sister became successful, I couldn't help feeling a bit more satisfied. I never thought their approval would have affected me the way it did.

Especially when you consider the volatile relationship I had as a teenager with my parents. The scene in "We're Not Gonna Take It" where the raging father chews out his son because of the condition of his room could have been shot live in the Snider household circa 1970:

"This room is a pigsty!" my father would scream. And with one sweep of his arm, everything on top of my desk, my dresser and my night table would be toppled to the floor. Once he dumped every dresser drawer and wall shelf into the middle of the room, emptied the garbage can—even flipped over my bed— growled, "Now clean this mess up," and stalked out, leaving me standing there, practically crying.

My father was a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde character—one day he could be the greatest guy in the world, and yet the next day life with Dad was a nightmare. Not to blame all my flaws on my parents, but many of my fears and hangups were the result of my father's unpredictable behavior. What I didn't know was that I was just the

target of his anger, not the real cause. Though I hated him for the way he treated me, I also loved him. I guess that's why his mood swings left me so hurt and confused. We'd never gotten along all that well, but once I hit adolescence, it seemed as if my father and I spoke two different languages and he didn't like me anymore. However, in talking to my friends, I discovered I wasn't the only kid feeling the friction at home. I'd hear a lot of comments like, "My parents suck!" and "I hate my mom and dad."

Having grown up and become a parent myself, I've come to understand my father's behavior better, although I never will condone it. Being a teenager, you're probably at your wit's end with your parents and wish that there was a reform school for wayward adults, though you doubt it would accept them. If you don't have any problems with your parents, consider yourself lucky. But do read on, to see how the less unfortunate (like me) live, as I try to shed a little light on these irrational beings called monsters—rather, parents.

First, as much as I lampoon—some would say attack—parents in my songs and videos, I honestly believe that the majority of them make an effort to be good mothers and fathers and sincerely love their children. The confusing part—and I realize this sounds ridiculous—is that they sometimes express their love by becoming angry and yelling, and sometimes by hitting, which is not exactly what I'd call a proper response.

Now, let's have some compassion for Mom and Dad for a minute. Only a minute. Their job—raising you—is not always rewarding, is sometimes downright maddening, and puts them in a position that, over the years, becomes obsolete. By the time they get really good at it, you're out of the house. For many parents, raising a kid is the most rewarding thing they will ever do. Think about that. From the day you were born, your parents nurture you, feed you, clothe you, teach you, discipline you. All this effort just so that one day you can leave home. Your first words may be *Mama* or *Dada,* but soon your vocabulary includes *Grandpa, Grandma, Aunt, Uncle* and the names of other friends and relatives. You now have relationships with many more people, your world gets larger, and you depend less and less on your parents. You learn how to walk, and before you know it you're wandering away from your folks at every opportunity. Mom and Dad are still the center of your universe, but now that you've been sprung from your crib, you're ready to expand your horizons. The attention you once gave only to your parents starts getting divided among grandparents and other relatives, then your school friends, teachers, camp counselors and others: psychiatrists, parole officers, space aliens and so on. Step by step, you withdraw from your parents. During your teens the separation becomes even more drastic. In your search for

"yourself," you begin to detach from—and at times reject—your parents because for so long your identity was tied up in theirs.

Your mom and dad, meanwhile, are torn between the joy of watching you blossom into young adulthood and the sadness of losing the little kid they used to cradle in their arms. They see you more as the tyke you were than as the young adult you're becoming. Some parents don't accept this change as readily as others do, and those who do not let go easily—particularly if the child is an only child, the firstborn or the youngest—may smother their child. That kid then wants to rebel against them even more.

It's So-ooo Embarrassing

"Hey, son, want to go to a movie tonight?" "Sure, Dad, as long as it's in another state."

Everybody goes through it, that stage when you'd rather die a slow, painful death than be seen with your parents in public. Correction: Being seen with your parents can be a slow, painful death in itself.

As a younger kid, you were probably so proud of the fact that your dad could make the best kites, or that your mom baked the coolest Halloween cookies. Now there are times when they embarrass you, either by acting too hip or too unhip, and you're petrified that your friends will see you as being like them. Arrgh!!! This is especially true because whenever you go out to a restaurant or a movie with your folks, you are expected to dress and act a certain way—usually your parents' way. You know that you will not be wearing your favorite dirty denim jacket to their favorite steak house, and that the next family movie night will not include a midnight showing of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

My parents were terminally unhip, which was just fine by me, especially when I saw the shame my friends with "hip" parents had to go through. There are probably some exceptions (such as myself), but "with-it" parents can really be the worst When I was a kid, there would always be one father who wore loud paisley ties, Nehru jackets and white bell-bottoms, and it was really kind of pathetic.

"Hi, Mr. Kendall!"

"Hi there, Bobby. Right arm!"

"Dad, the expression is *right on."*

"Oh, yeah, yeah. I can dig your scene!"

Barf!

The day you come home to find Mom dancing around the living room as she vacuums, pretending to be Madonna, or Dad in a studded denim jacket, demonstrating the moon walk for your friends, try to be sympathetic. Either it's something in their laxative, or maybe they're just going through a phase.

I remember feeling mortified every time the whole eight-strong Snider gang went on an outing to the beach or a park. My father was really crazy about the idea of a half-dozen kids and loved it every time the "six Mouseketeers" were all together.

"Here they are," he'd call out. "my own basketball team!" While he was smiling proudly, I'd be looking around frantically for the nearest rock to hide under.

It must have hurt him when one day, for no reason that he could see, his kids didn't want to go to the beach with their dad anymore, when they started to reject him and his values. As a kid, I would imitate my dad, because to me everything he did was the best. Suddenly, at age thirteen, that all stopped. Being a father myself, I know that there is no greater feeling than to have your child adore you and model himself after you. I'm experiencing it right now with my son Jesse. He'll ask his mom to stencil a fake tattoo on his arm so that he can "be like Daddy." He even has a little leather motorcycle jacket and cutoff denim vest like mine, he knows all of my songs by heart, and he imitates my videos.

The day the imitating stops the parent feels abandoned. Mothers feel replaced in their sixteen-year-old son's world by his new girlfriend or his electric guitar; fathers think that their daughter's new boyfriend or her favorite teacher has taken their place. I've accepted that one day it's going to happen to me, that Jesse is probably going to reject what I am and what I stand for, because that is part of growing up. Just as having to give up the authority you once held over your children and enduring the heartbreak of watching them separate from you is part of being a parent.

I'm convinced that one reason my father hated my long hair wasn't just because he liked me in crew cuts. The real reason was that he wanted to keep me as little Danny Snider, a miniature version of himself, for I had always worn my hair identical to his. My lengthening locks were a constant reminder to him that I was becoming my own person. And it worked both ways. Subconsciously, I felt that when my dad could no longer control the way I wore my hair or the way I dressed, he couldn't control me.

Later I found out that not only were my feelings about my father changing then, so were his about me. My father kept photo albums of all of us, but they always seemed to end when we reached thirteen or fourteen years old. One day my brothers, my sister and I were at my parents' house, and my father asked, "Do you want to see photos of you guys when you were older?"

"Yeah!" we chorused in unison. He went to his bedroom closet and got out a large manila envelope marked with the letters *JD*—standing not for "just delightful" but for "juvenile delinquents"; funny

guy, my dad. In it were snapshots of me and my brothers with long hair, wearing leather jackets, riding motorcycles and hotrods and generally looking like the dirtbags we were.

Funny, isn't it? The part of my life that I wish to forget—being weak little Danny Snider—is what he remembers most fondly. When he looks at me even now, he doesn't see the same Dee Snider the rest of the world sees, with the long hair, the earrings, the tattoo and the fangs. My dad sees little Danny, his firstborn, honorable son number one. If he lives until I'm sixty, that is probably what he will always see. And when he looks at my brothers Frank, Matt, Mark and Doug, he sees Frankie, Matty, Marky and Dougie. (Don't ask me what the deal was with the "e" sound at the end of everyone's names; I didn't name us, my mother and father did.)

"When I Was a Kid" (You Mean They Weren't Born Old?)

No matter how many times your parents may start a story with that phrase—which is sure to make your eyes roll and lull you into the best sleep you've had in weeks—they don't really remember what it was like being a kid. Maybe they don't want to. Or maybe if they do remember it, they may feel that as parents, their job is to give you the edited version of the story; in other words, they leave out all the good stuff. If parents could be completely honest about it, they might tell you how they rebelled against their parents by staying up all night doing the dance the Twist, running around with their friends and rejecting their parents' values. Ask your grandparents or aunts and uncles about your folks. Don't be surprised if you hear about the time your mom screamed herself hoarse at a Rolling Stones concert, or the time your dad was dating a beatnik girl and never took off his sunglasses in the house for a whole summer. Chances are, you may hear things about your folks that, in their own strange way, sound a lot like you today. But most parents can't or won't admit to having problems when they were kids. It may be just too embarrassing for them, or maybe they've blocked it out, choosing to keep the happy memories instead. That's human nature. Generally, though, most parents cannot stand the thought that you might see them as less than perfect, So when you ask your father if he ever failed a test, you may get an answer that could fertilize several acres: "Fail? When I was your age, I had triple the amount of work you kids have today, built a suspension bridge in the backyard for my science project and discovered a cheap and effective cure for the common cold. And that's not all, young man. I also held down three after-school jobs—including one in France—and..."

Blah blah blah.

Think about it, though. People really haven't changed all that much in the last few decades. When you see old films of teenagers, whether they're swinging to Frank Sinatra, swooning over Elvis Presley or rolling in the mud at Woodstock, you can bet that today most of them have one thing in common—they are parents. Were there more perfect kids ten, twenty, thirty years ago? Give me a break. And what do you think the odds are that your parents were totally perfect as kids? About the same as the odds that you are totally perfect.

If there are any parents sneaking a look at this chapter, here are some words for you, Mom and Dad. When your child asks about your past, try to be honest. Remember your period of rebellion as you tried to discover your identity, and think of all the crazy—and dumb—things you did, as well as those that you are most proud of. And keep in mind that even if you did give your parents something to worry about now and then, you turned out okay. Guide your children, but give them the benefit of the doubt, even if that means occasionally watching them fail. Also try to remember how useless your parents' "Don't worry, you're young, you'll get over it" seemed when you ran to them with a problem that to you was important but they considered insignificant. Or think of how lame advice such as, "Well, why don't you just tell so-and-so to stop teasing you?" really was. It's a parent's responsibility to give real answers to real problems.

Remember. Then empathize with your kid. Above all, try to be consistent in your behavior, with both praise and criticism. In a teenager's turbulent world, the only constant is his parents.

Like a Rock (Or a Reasonable Facsimile)

That is what all of us—even grown-ups—want and need our parents to be: stable, sturdy. It wasn't just that my father could be a terror that drove me out of my mind, it was not understanding the wild shifts in his moods. Later on I saw the causes, but at fifteen and sixteen I didn't have a clue.

To support his large family, my father worked as a cop and moonlighted as an insurance salesman. I didn't always appreciate how hard he worked to support us, but I do now. Whether he received a second paycheck to keep the family going depended on his ability to sell insurance. The pressure must have been tremendous. When he didn't sell, his mood was black and the whole house was in turmoil. I can't count the times he'd come home from work, throw down his briefcase and start combing the house to see if my siblings and I had performed our household chores to his satisfaction. If one of us hadn't...

Crash! You'd hear the clatter of a garbage can being turned upside down. "Frankie, get down here this minute!" You'd hear the footsteps racing up the staircase and the door slam open. "Clean this mess up now!" If he'd had a bad day, watch out. He drove a Ford Mustang with a whiny transmission that you could hear all the way down the street, and we used to tense up every time we heard it. What mood would he be in today?

On days when insurance sales were good, my father became the greatest guy in the world. I remember me, my sister and my brothers having these massive paper fights with him, when we'd roll up newspapers and whack one another with them, and it would be us six kids against Dad. The whole house would be littered with paper, and we'd all laugh till we cried. Those were good times.

His erratic behavior baffled us. I didn't understand that when he barreled into the house after a tough day of selling and demanded I clean up my room, it wasn't my messy room that had him so upset. He was taking out on us the anxiety he felt after not having made any sales. He was worried about how to make ends meet. However, I'm sure that he was not half as scared as me, getting screamed at and demoralized and not knowing why.

I believe that parents owe their children a certain amount of stability. When Mom and Dad have a bad day at the office, or are worried about the bills or the fact that one of your grandparents is ill, they should try to control their anger and frustration. Now, that may not always be possible. We all know how it feels when things get to be too much to handle, for kids get just as overwhelmed by things as adults do. Just because your mom and dad occasionally blow up at you for what seems like little or no reason doesn't mean they are bad parents or they don't love you. If only my father, when he was in a bad mood, had come home and said, "Kids, I really don't want to be bothered tonight. I've had a bad day." That would have made life so much easier. I might have understood. At the very least, I would have been warned. But the door swings both ways. If Mom comes home and says she's had a really bad day, or if your dad tells you that he's got a lot on his mind, back off. Tell them that you care about them, that you hope they feel better, that you wish you could help. Hold off on bugging them about giving you extra money for concert tickets or throwing your daily tantrum because your little sister is wearing your T-shirt. Think for a minute: Can it wait until tomorrow morning, or even a few hours from now? If it can, drop it till then. If it can't, good luck, gang.

Learn About Your Parents—Read the Manual

It's amazing how we can go through our entire childhood and adolescence without ever really getting to know our parents. We obey them, love them, resent them at times, but rarely do we ever learn about them, their past and their beliefs. I found that discovering my parents' past, besides being interesting, gave me a great deal of insight into their behavior. Just call me Sigmund Freud.

For example, my parents grew up during the Great Depression of the 1930s and grew up in a tough, hard world. In order to stay alive, their parents had to scrape, claw and save every penny they could, working inhuman hours in disgraceful conditions. My grandfather earned $13 a week as a tool-and-die man.

During the Depression era, people's dreams didn't come true; that happened only in the movies. You looked for any work you could get, whether or not it was something you enjoyed doing. All that mattered was that you were earning a salary and not starving or standing on a soup line, as millions did during the thirties. Knowing that, you can understand why my parents were uneasy, to put it mildly, with my career choice. Rock & roll star? Why not dictator of Bolivia? The odds that I would ever become either one were about the same—a billion to one. While I saw myself as a brave individual destined to follow his dream, my folks saw their dumb kid Danny speeding toward a brick wall headfirst, no helmet, no brakes.

The problem back then was that I didn't know about their past, their hopes and dreams. They tried to discourage my ambitions in music because they didn't want to see me get hurt or have to suffer. They were doing the best they could and trying to pass on to me things they'd learned. Today 1 see all that. I don't necessarily agree with their attitude, but at least I know that when they criticized my choice of career, they weren't trying to hurt me, they were trying to help. But at the time, it did hurt.

I had a musician friend whose father always discouraged him. Richie never knew why until one day his mother told him a story about his dad. Apparently, his father's father was always extremely critical of him. One day when his father was five years old he proudly showed his dad a picture he'd drawn in school and said, "Look at the picture I drew, Daddy!"

My friend's grandfather pulled out an art book, turned to a painting by the famous artist Rembrandt and said, "You call that a picture? *This* is a picture." Ever since that day, even though he is as talented as the next guy, Richie's father puts himself down. "I can't sing," he'll say. Or, "I'm not artistic." Too bad that he repeats his father's behavior with his own son.

No matter what your problem with your parents, understanding always helps. When you get a chance, ask your folks about their own

teenage years. Chances are you'll learn a lot that can help you relate to them better. For all the time parents and children spend together, so little of it is spent communicating. And the basis of any good relationship—between parents and children, two lovers or two friends —is communication.

Ironically, today my parents and I communicate better than we ever did. Then again, anything would have been an improvement. It's a shame that when I was growing up, we couldn't have the type of discussions we do now. But at the time, my parents— like so many— preferred to be kept in the dark. I think a lot of parents are afraid to discuss their teenagers' problems with them because of what they might hear—"Mother, I'm having sex with my boyfriend, and I want to know about contraception," or "Yes, father, I've smoked marijuana a few times." Some parents worry that they won't have the right answers, or feel—wrongly —that ignoring the problem will make it go away. Again, these aren't attitudes only parents have; we all do. Very few of us think about a big problem and say to ourselves, "I can't wait to get myself into that mess." Avoiding problems is very human, but it never helps.

Parents may also try to brush off a kid's problems because, believe me, it's painful to see your children hurt. You feel for them, and remembering what it was like to be hurt as a kid, you want to do everything you can to make them stop hurting. My son Jesse was being teased by some kids in his nursery school class, and I have to admit that I was ready to go down to the school and tear those kids apart. Can't you just picture it, me versus a handful of terrified four-year-olds? I couldn't do it, and I shouldn't. Like all kids, Jesse will learn how to deal with these situations himself. But that doesn't mean I don't feel for him or that I wouldn't give him advice in handling a situation if he asked. It's hard for parents to know where to draw the line. How involved should they get? Every situation is different. For the most part, though, if you let your parents know that you appreciate their help and their intentions—even when their advice is wrong, which is much of the time—you'll go a long way to keeping the lines of communication open.

Communication Is the Key

If you are unhappy with your relationship with your parents, you owe it to yourself to try to open up communication. It's the best solution. That means communicate, not agitate; discuss, not accuse; be assertive but not defensive. Control your temper and calmly explain your side of things. To demand, rant, sulk and generally behave like a child will not convince your parents that you deserve to be treated

like an adult. Nobody said this was going to be easy.

Communication with your parents is very important during this time of your life, when they probably feel increasingly separated from you and your world. When parents begin to feel shut out, they often try to pry their way back in. Some parents snoop into their kids' affairs or question every little thing they do. "Who is this Jimmy you're going out with tonight?" "What do you kids do at these parties?" Do parents have a right to know these things? Yes. Will it kill you to tell them? Maybe, but unless you're doing something you shouldn't be doing or are hanging out with people you know you shouldn't be around, go ahead and tell them anyway. I hate to say it, gang, but if you can't tell your parents what you're up to, ask yourself why not. Is it something dangerous? Illegal? If you're not going to tell your parents, at least be truthful with yourself, look at what you're doing and know what you're getting into.

There are going to be certain things you can't tell your parents about, no matter how innocent. For example, I own a gym on Long Island. When people join up, they have to sign a disclaimer, acknowledging the possibility exists that they might drop a weight, strain a muscle or break a toe. There are some parents who worry so much about their kids, they won't let them work out at the gym. Their kids aren't asking permission to do drugs, they want to do something healthy, but their folks are afraid. So some of the kids go behind their parents' backs and forge their signatures. The parents have their ideas of right and wrong, the kids have theirs. The bottom line is, be responsible to yourself.

Sometimes, some parents' imaginations can get pretty wild. When your mother asks if you plan to swallow any bats at the Ozzy Osbourne concert tonight, you can reassure her by pointing out that Ozzy doesn't eat bats and that, besides, you only eat mice.

Rather than duck their questions or lie about what you're doing and where you're going, set their minds at ease by inviting them into your world. Introduce them to your friend Jimmy. When they see that he doesn't have a jail record, they'll trust you more for showing that you have good judgment, and you'll feel free to remove the explosives-proof lock from your bedroom door. However, if Jimmy looks anything like me, you're dead meat.

Show Your Love

There is no greater feeling in the world than hearing my son say, "I love you, Dad," which he says a lot. He's a much more open, expressive kid than I was. In the Snider household, those three words —I love you—were never said. Even today, I still have a hard time

with it. I'll tell my parents, "Love you, guys," "We [my wife, my son and I] love you," or "Love ya," but I find it incredibly tough to say I love you.

My wife's family is just the opposite. They say it all the time to one another. I'm working on becoming more openly expressive and physically affectionate with my parents. I'm sorry that we didn't say those words when I was growing up. Try to make the effort with your parents. Just about anything you do in life can get to be a habit. You'll find that after you say it the first couple of times, it gets easier and easier. Not only does it feel good to hear it, it feels equally good to say it.

Parents Make Mistakes

My father and I keep having the same argument. He claimed to follow what I call the "Boy Named Sue" method of parenting. "A Boy Named Sue" was a big hit song for country singer Johnny Cash many years ago. It was supposed to be sort of funny and is about how a father who took off on his family named his son Sue so that he would grow up tough. Like Sue's dad, my father insists that if he hadn't treated me the way he did, I wouldn't have had the anxieties that spurred my ambition and drove me to become a success. Get it? Well, it doesn't really make a lot of sense to me, either, and when he says it, I always come back with, "Oh yeah? Well, how do you know that I wouldn't have been happier as a well-adjusted accountant?" It's a topic on which we'll never agree.

My parents made mistakes raising me—you can tell just by looking at me—but now I understand that since I was their first, bringing up a kid was as new to them as growing up was to me. I also see that most parents invest much time, energy and love in their kids and only want the best for them. However, sometimes their idea of what is best for Junior isn't exactly what Junior thinks is best for him. Hi, I'm Junior.

My father always wanted to be a baseball player. It was one of his dreams, but he never really got the chance. I happened to be a natural at baseball and had the perfect body for it, tall and lanky. My dad encouraged me to play ball, which I liked, but I liked music more, and I quit baseball for rock & roll. My father's disappointment over my choice bordered on disgust, and it lasted for many years.

I felt as though he resented me and didn't like me. He thought that I could have been Mickey Mantle, but I wanted to be Alice Cooper. From the time I was twelve until I was eighteen, we hardly talked to each other, though he yelled a lot. Lucky for me there was my younger brother Mark, who had a more intense love for baseball

than I ever did. At last my father was able to live his dream through Mark, which lessened the pressure on me and made it easier for my father to accept my decision.

Nevertheless, my father now has a great interest in my rock & roll career. He's always been a real geography freak, and at home he keeps maps on the wall and follows Twisted Sister's tours by placing little flags on each of the fifty states and on foreign countries, with different colors signifying "been there before" or "multiple visits." No matter how old I get, my mom and dad can't help acting like parents. It's hilarious: They'll both try to give me advice on rock & roll. "We think you should release this song as the next single." For virtually my whole life they discouraged me; now they practically want to manage the band. Next thing you know, my father's going to want to join the group as third guitarist.

Parental Pressure (Aspirin Won't Help)

Parents often see themselves in their children. When they reject or criticize a fault in you, it may be because it's one they see and don't especially like in themselves. Just what you needed, misdirected criticism. Parents who believe they failed in some way when they were kids—maybe they weren't as popular or as good at sports as they wanted to be—may try too hard to keep their children from being disappointed or failing in these areas. Some parents react by either pushing their children too hard in one direction, as my father did with me when it came to baseball, or by being overprotective and discouraging them from trying new things. Overprotective parents often think that it's always better for their kids not to be hurt or disappointed, even if that means the kids never get to try anything new or prove themselves.

If your parents fall into one of these categories, you have to learn to resist their pressure as best you can. It was incredibly difficult for me, feeling that my father was ready to disown me because I was picking a guitar instead of grounders at third base. But I had to do what was right for me, and despite the pressure, I did. As it turned out, I don't think my father is so disappointed after all.

The opposite of the overbearing or overly concerned parent is the mother or father who believes in never setting limits. You're probably saying, "Sounds great. Where do I get a parent like that?" Believe it or not, many kids who have overly permissive parents suffer a lot of anxiety because they think their parents don't care about them.

Teenagers whose parents don't set any limits for them often get into self-destructive, attention-seeking behavior, such as substance abuse or sexual promiscuity, in an attempt to force Mom and Dad to

sit up and take notice. I heard of a kid who has one of those hip, modern "Do your own thing, man" parents. After seeing the tyrannical father in the "We're Not Gonna Take It" video, he practically begged his dad to scream at him. "You don't yell at us like all the other parents," he complained. "You don't really love us."

Reconciliation (Comes After Conciliation)

The famous author Mark Twain once said, "The older I get, the smarter my parents become." And by the same token, the older you get, the more reasonable and more responsible you become to your parents. Both sides begin to give a little. You're not so edgy when it comes to establishing your independence - it's established—and they're not so fixed on keeping you tripped as a child. (Actually, they've given up.) They're finally letting go and accepting you as a mature young adult. It's natural for the gap between parents and adolescents to be bridged as you reach your late teens or after you leave home. Yes, as hard as this may seem to believe, the odds are that the day will come when you and your parents will enjoy each other's company, and every suggestion they make will not send you screaming to your room. Screaming to your own home, maybe. My dad and I improved our relationship, and if we can do it, anyone can.

Strangely enough, what finally brought my father and me closer together was a newspaper article. The Long Island newspaper Newsday was preparing a cover story on me for its Sunday magazine, and it was one of the proudest days of my parents' lives. In the article I discussed my often unhappy childhood and my anger toward my parents. As usual, I did not mince words.

When my father read that article, he finally realized that I had not had the ideal childhood. Here he and my mother had spent years thinking that they had been near-perfect parents, with six healthy kids, all of whom had grown up to be successful, happily married adults. At first, when they read the article, they were humiliated; after all, half a million people were reading this. But then my parents got a big surprise. It turned out that the parent-teen friction in the Snider household wasn't so different from that of other families, and they had nothing to be ashamed of. Soon other parents approached them and told them that they thought it was a great article and how things had been basically the same for them and their kids. After that my parents took a look at their attitudes and values, and we began to talk more honestly with one another. My dad and I are now friends, which is something he's wanted for a while and I always wanted.

Shortly after the article, we were walking together, and my father told me that when we were all very young, he had an insurance

customer with a large brood of children. My father marveled at how well mannered and well behaved they were, and so he asked the man what was the recipe for making such great kids.

The client replied, "Remember this: You are not their friend, you are their father. You don't want them to like you, you want them to respect and obey you. When they are grown up, then you can be their friend."

Unfortunately, my father followed that piece of advice to the letter. We respected end obeyed him, out of fear. And true to his mentor, he was never our friend. He used to scream at us, "This is not 'My Three Sons/ and I'm not Fred MacMurray," referring to an old TV show on which the actor portrayed an amiable father much like Bill Cosby as Dr. Cliff Huxstable. But after we had all moved out and began our own lives, my father decided it was now time to be his children's friend. After all the years of being "Father"—Grand, Exalted, Omnipotent One—he wanted to be just "Bob." None of us could do it, and my dad was stunned.

It's really perfect, just as weak Danny Snider seems like a stranger to me today, so It is with my father. The guy 1 talk to and joke with now is not the man I grew up fearing and disliking. I don't know what happened to the other guy, but the dude hanging out at my place today is not him, he's the kind of father I always wanted. I love the new dad and feel very close to him. And I hardly ever bring up the past to him anymore. I know how hard it is to be a good parent. Besides, our future looks too good to spoil with things that can't be changed. But I do have one last ax to grind.

Remember I told you about my being a lonely kid with nothing else to look forward to all week except to watch "Star Trek" on TV? Knowing how much "Star Trek" meant to me, my father would use it to get me to do things, "Clean your room, or you can't watch 'Star Trek' tonight." Blackmail. *Grrrr*.

In the middle of one of the best episodes I'd ever seen, "The Doomsday Machine," my dad yelled at me to come upstairs and clean my room "this very instant!" I begged him to wait just until "Star Trek" was over, but no-ooo. I had to do it n-o-w, and so I missed the second half. For nearly twenty years—longer than you've probably been alive, a lifetime! it gnawed at me. Well, I bought a videocassette of the episode, and do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to invite my father over, Then I'll get him to go upstairs and call me to clean my room, so that I can yell, "F**k you!" And sit back and watch my show with a big grin on my face. No, better yet, I'll make my father watch It with me.

Getting along at home

Households are like corporations. There are the top executives (your parents), junior executives (older brothers and sisters) and peons (your younger brothers and sisters and assorted pets). The older you are, the greater your responsibilities, so being a junior exec isn't necessarily better than being a peon.

Many years ago one of the main reasons people had kids was to help with the work around the farm. I still wonder if my parents didn't have six of us just so that my father wouldn't have to mow the lawn. In our house, everybody had chores: One of us had to empty the garbage cans after dinner, someone else had to clear the table, someone else washed the dishes and so on. When your parents give you a certain job, it's not necessarily to punish, even though some parents do threaten their kids with extra chores. The bigger the family, the more work there is to be done around the house, and the more impossible it is for Mom and Dad to do it alone. Everyone has to do his part, unless you like living in a pigsty.

Besides, it all prepares you for life as an adult, as unglamorous as that may seem. Who do you think takes out the garbage at my house? Well, the housekeeper. But I'd do it myself if I didn't have one.

Curfews (Gesundheit)

Curfews are a safety check, not a method of torture, but when you're a teenager, no curfew is ever late enough. Once you've discovered the fun that can be had escaping into the night with your friends, if it were left completely up to you, you'd probably return home sometime the following month. I never had any conflicts over curfews with my parents, but then, they never let me go out. Well, almost never.

A curfew shouldn't be so rigid that it will inevitably get broken. For instance, if you're going to see a concert, the show lets out at approximately ten o'clock, but then you've got to wind your way through the crowd, maybe you want to cop a T-shirt, then critique the show with a few of your friends in the parking lot. After all, being part of the scene is almost as much an attraction as the show itself. So although your curfew on school flights is ten o'clock, there's no way you're going to be able to get home before eleven-thirty. For parents to insist on a strict curfew in this instance is impractical and is going to result in one bummed-out kid.

"Why are you so upset? I let you go to the concert."

"Yeah, but I had to leave before the show *started*!"

Hopefully, by calmly explaining the need for a curfew extension to your parents, they will be reasonable and grant you some slack. In any case, always remember that if you get delayed in heading home,

find a phone and call your parents, for the best way to gain more freedom is to prove that you know what it means to be responsible.

Punishment—What's Fair?

I don't think a parent can properly raise a child without sometimes resorting to discipline. But I do not believe in hitting or spanking, though occasionally it can be the only method that works. One day my father jokingly said to my son Jesse that if he didn't obey him, he'd give him "a licking" like he used to give me. A licking. Jesse found this concept hilarious. Being so young and sort of literal-minded, he really thought that his grandfather was going to stick out his tongue and start licking him.

As a parent, figuring out what is the proper punishment is very complicated. I learned from my family that physical punishment is not the answer. My father changed his mind about hitting us after he chased one of my brothers up the stairs one day, took a swing, missed and smashed a clenched fist into the steps. When he realized just how hard he'd hit it, he realized that his anger was getting the best of him. So he decided that making us write would be a better punishment.

Writing *I will not hang my coat up on the bannister* (I don't know about you, but it still seems to be a logical place) five hundred times could blow an entire Saturday. Know something, though? It worked. After you got hit, you cried, then it was over, and you were back to your old ways in no time. But, boy, you remembered for a long time that beautiful Saturday you spent in your room writing.

Parents should make the punishment fit the crime and learn to choose their battles. There is a great difference between a teenager forgetting to put away his socks—or hanging his coat on the bannister—and forgetting to turn off the stove or setting the woods on fire (which my brothers did, twice). To give out the same punishment reduces the punishment's impact and doesn't help you learn from your mistake. Ultimately that is the purpose of punishment: to get you to understand what you did wrong, although many parents don't consider carefully enough the effects of punishment on their kids.

With Jesse, I find it difficult even to get angry. I have to force myself, put on a bit of an act. I try to reason with him, to make him understand why what he's doing is wrong, and warn him so that I never actually have to yell at him or give him a light whack on the bottom. I'll admit it, I'm a pushover father. Somehow, compared to the threat of nuclear war, the milk my kid spilled doesn't seem all that important.

I usually tell Jesse, I'm going to count to five, and if you don't behave, I'm going to have to hit you, and you know I don't want to do

that. One, two ... I've yet to reach three. Works every time. Of course, if I caught Jesse running into the middle of a busy street or about to take a drink of Drano, my reaction would probably be quite different. It's no doubt the same with your parents. Some things that may not seem to be such a big deal to you may make them react angrily, sometimes entirely out of proportion to the situation. However, although your parents may not know everything, they probably still know more than you do. And they often see dangers in your actions that you either don't understand or don't really believe exist.

Brothers and sisters

The kids in a family are sort of like the warring nations in a science-fiction movie. Every country in the world is at war with the others until the Martians threaten to blow up the earth. Then they all band together to laserize the aliens. And in any family the parents are the Martians. To this day when my sister, my four brothers and I get together, the main topic of conversation is our parents. In fact, if we didn't have them to talk about, we'd probably all sit there in silence, twiddling our thumbs. My parents used some creative planning in designing their family, with three distinct stages: First me, a year later my sister Susan, then a year off for Mom. Then my brother Frank, a year later Matt and another year off. Then came Mark and—you guessed it—a year later, Doug. This ingenious arrangement provided each of us with a fighting opponent of a similar weight and height class. Each pair fought each other; then we had what I guess you'd call the World Sibling Wrestling Federation (WSWF) Championship Match, when the meanest of each class would tangle with one another. But whenever Mom or Dad was on our case, the six of us were united in a battle royal, warding off the alien attack.

Sometimes you look at your brother or sister and it's hard to believe that you were born of the same parents. I'm sure that for years my brothers and sister have been waiting for my parents to break out my adoption papers. We all seem so different. For example, Frank is four years younger and the complete opposite of me. Always was. I'd be listening to Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and Black Sabbath, while he was into softer music like the Beatles, Elton John and the Beach Boys. I was a rock & roller, while he was a biker type; mean as a snake, and I don't think he liked me too much. Both he and I were the champs of our weight classes, and we used to face off all the time.

On the other hand, my second-youngest brother, Mark, and I enjoyed the same music and got along great. Music may not sound like it should be the determining factor whether you get along with your siblings, but when you're packed three to a room as we were,

believe me, it's important. As a matter of fact, I take credit for Mark now being the producer of the nationally syndicated heavy-metal-music radio program "Metal Shop." I personally made him into a metal head by playing my Alice Cooper, Zeppelin and Sabbath albums at brain-damaging volume that had him begging for mercy. (Don't thank me, Mark, it must have been the back-masking.)

Maybe you don't get along with your siblings. If you're a girl, perhaps your older brother teases you about your boobs, about your boyfriend, about everything, it seems. And if you have a baby sister, you may be jealous because it seems to you that she gets away with murder. Daddy's Little Girl, you call her, sneering. You won't believe this, but your brothers and sisters may turn out to be some of the best friends you'll have in life. Think about it. Who else knows you better, has had the same experiences as you and has grown up in the same atmosphere?

Of course, that doesn't mean that as they get older, they will be more like you than they are now. But you will find that as you get older, you can more easily relate to people who are different from you than you do now. The older we get, the more my sister, brothers and I have in common—marriage, mortgages, kids— and we've become extremely close, seeing one another regularly. We hang out together, we party together and now we see how similar we all are on some very basic levels. We're all nuts.

It's natural while you're growing up to feel rivalrous at times. My brothers and I sometimes griped because our sister was favored by our parents. I went through a period when I didn't communicate with Susan, who, because she was pretty, began hanging out with and was accepted by the very people giving me grief at school. It was a shame, because until that point we had always been there for each other. And we have been since that time.

If you have older brothers and sisters, realize that they've already experienced some of the things you're going through and have certain insights that can help you through a crisis. If they act like you're being a real pest, don't give up. Very few of us will ever deny that being asked for help or advice isn't good for the ego. And when you have younger brothers or sisters, remember that you were once a little squirt too. Try to enjoy them for what they are—people who aren't competing with you to drive the car. At least, not yet.

I always felt bad that I was never like the big brothers you see on TV: devastatingly handsome, incredibly popular, cool, strong, athletic —the type of guy they name high schools after. Unfortunately, I didn't have the "right stuff." Most kids would brag about their big brothers. My brothers were embarrassed: "I don't have a big brother." "That funny-looking guy? He's just a boarder at our house."

Being Your Own Person

It can be extremely difficult to establish your identity within a family. If you had visited the Snider household while we were all growing up, we would practically trip over one another to grab your attention. It was like walking into a six-ring circus.

Sometimes, it still is.

I give my parents credit for spreading around evenly the limited amount of attention they could give us. It seems to be natural that the oldest and youngest children receive the most attention, while those in the middle sometimes get overlooked. It was because I was the oldest and initially received 100 percent of the attention that I always wanted more than I got. Once my sister was born, the doting affection was cut in half. With Frank's arrival, it was split three ways. And so on.

Another problem when you're the oldest: You're the guinea pig when it comes to parenting. Just recently my parents actually *apologized* to me for some of the mistakes they made raising me. My mother explained that in the 1950s there were few books on how to bring up children, and so their system was based on trial and error, If it worked on me, they used it on my brothers and sister. If it didn't, back to the drawing board. With each child, they got a better understanding of how to be good parents and also became less strict. Every first child I know says the same thing about how their parents treated the younger kids—they can't believe how easy their younger brothers and sisters have it.

If you're one of the younger siblings in your family, I'm sure you've had to face some comparisons—from your friends, from your teachers, even from your parents. Comedian Bobcat Goldthwait has this hysterical routine about how it's tough enough being the sibling of the football team captain; imagine if your older brother were Jesus Christ?

[Jesus' mother, Mary]: "Why can't you be like your brother? When he's home, we always have wine!"

[Jesus' brother]: "But, Mom, he's the messiah!"

Even if the older brother or sister you're being compared to is a model student or a small-time criminal, it's still a pain, because you're not being accepted for who you are. People meet my youngest brother, Doug, and say, "Gee, he's nothing like you." As if he's supposed to be Dee 2—The Nightmare Continues. Just what the world needs, right? Two of me.

Doug had the burden of being compared to all of us. I was a nonentity in high school, but Frank and Matt were pretty notorious, especially Frank. One time he pulled a fire extinguisher off the wall

and emptied it on the next kid who turned the corner. When the kid tried to defend himself, Frank proceeded to beat him to a pulp, screaming in his face, "When I'm only playing, you're only playing!" And walked away. Yep, just the sort of person you want to be compared to.

Years later teachers taking attendance on the first day of school would turn white when they got to "Snider, Doug." For a few minutes Doug wasn't Doug, he was Frank's brother. He was instantly judged, even though he was nothing at all like Frank. "I'll be keeping an eye on you, Snider," the teachers would say menacingly.

In your case, maybe an older brother or sister got great grades and you don't, or they may have been great athletes and you're really not. Teachers and others probably don't really mean anything when they make those comparisons; they just don't think. If you believe that you're being judged unfairly by others, don't hesitate to remind people, "I'm not my brother or my sister. I'm me."

8. School Dazed

Maybe this sounds like your school: The school colors are black and white—horizontal stripes, with numbers across the front, and an optional ball and chain. In the yearbook each student is immortalized with two photos: a side view and a mug shot. The mascot is Darth Vader.

And the teachers? Mostly deposed dictators from foreign countries you never heard of. Between classes, they huddle together, plotting an invasion of Romania. For fun they shove students down the stairs and then sentence them to the principal's office for breaking limbs without a hall pass. School lunches are neither meat, fish nor fowl but, it is rumored, compressed vegetable matter used in the manufacturing of NFL footballs. All water fountains have been yanked from the walls, and after one kid is caught in the criminal act of washing his hands, the superintendent sees to it that the doors to all bathrooms are hermetically sealed shut—with several students still inside.

Yeah, yeah, I'm exaggerating again, but when you're serving your six years of junior high and high school with no time off for good behavior, it can sometimes seem that bad. It's like I wrote in the song "Be Chrool to Your Scuel":

I don't think I'll make it through another day. It's eight o'clock, and all ain't well My brain hurts so much, it's startin' to decay And I'm livin' in my private hell.Now, there must be a better way to educate, Cause this ain't workin' like it should. Can't they just invent a pill or frozen concentrate, That makes you smarter and tastes, mmm, so good?

Despite what those lyrics say, I didn't really hate school. I accepted it as a necessity. And there were things about it I enjoyed—like lunch. There are certain constants in life: governments, taxes; parents, kids; and school. As much as teenagers like to complain about it, I don't think anybody seriously thinks education should be abolished. But it makes people feel better to gripe, so it's: Friday, yay! Monday, boo. First day of school, boo. Last day, yay! Me? I kvetched like everybody else.

There are so many school-related pressures, all heralded by the shrill ring of a bell or jarring blast of a siren. What a nice touch. Every forty-five minutes your environment changes, in a rush of students charging down the halls to get to their next class. You're just getting comfortable in English, with a teacher you find kind of interesting (for a change) and a few of your friends dozing at nearby desks, when it's time for biology. Aargh. You, who gets queasy at the mere sight of blood, are expected today to perform triple bypass surgery on a frog.

One slip with the scalpel and you could be hit with the largest medical malpractice suit ever filed by an amphibian. To make matters worse, your lab partner likes to flick selected frog organs at you. Then he licks his fingers.

Sometimes sitting in a school classroom is like crouching in a war zone foxhole, having to be on constant alert to ward off a teacher's attack. You're in geometry, you basically know what's going on except for the Pythagorean theorem, and you're keeping your fingers crossed that the instructor will call on you for anything but that. But of course: "And who can explain to the class the Pythagorean theorem? How about Mis-ter-r-r-r . [Your Name Here]?"

You can tell by the mad gleam in his eyes that he has it in for you today. You blow the answer, and you know you're not going to be let off the hook. With a sinister laugh: "Why don't you come up to … the blackboard?" No, not the blackboard! Already you can hear your classmates' giggling, as the teacher bombards you with wave upon wave of questions which may as well be in a foreign language. By the time he orders you back to your desk, you've been reduced to a small, smoldering ember with shoes, It's amazing how one bad class can spoil your whole day, and you can't wait for the final bell to ring so that you can go home and drown your sorrows in a glass of Nestle's Quik.

Then there is the pressure to perform, which comes from your friends, your teachers, but mostly your parents. Testing and grading will go on for the rest of your life—by employers and those around you—but not in the form of written exams or quarterly report cards to be handed over to mothers and fathers for scrutinization. (Look it up!) Some make such unreasonable, unrealistic scholastic demands, their kids think subconsciously that to do poorly in a class is to lose their parents' love. Imagine the strain that places on a teenager. I didn't have to face that kind of pressure, but whenever my grades weren't up to par— which was most of the time—my parents always threatened to take away certain privileges, usually starting with rock & roll. Actually, anything that I enjoyed doing was blamed for my inadequate grades: sports, TV, my hair (it must have been obstructing my vision), my clothes, my friends, even my after-school jobs.

How important are grades, and do they accurately reflect your intelligence? The answers: (a) usually as important as they are to your parents, and (b) sometimes. Plenty of A and B-plus students are aces at memorization who can repeat what they've been taught but not understand a word. That's not learning. Learning means examining a problem or an idea and analyzing it: taking the facts and interpreting them or relating them to the world in which we live. We don't dwell inside a vacuum; neither can we get an education in one.

I breezed f through most of Bay view Avenue Elementary School,

getting A's without even trying. But then my parents moved from Freeport to Baldwin, where the schools had some of the highest academic standards in the country, and suddenly my grades deteriorated to C pluses. I really had to bust my hump lust to keep up, whereas my best friend. Don, was an honors student, never took notes in class. He didn't own a looseleaf binder. Frustrated, I asked him how he did it.

"I don't waste time in class," he said, I pay attention, I *listen*. Everybody else is so busy furiously scribbling down notes, they don't understand what they're writing. It's like they're worried about putting down on paper what's coming out of the teacher's mouth, It goes directly from the ears to the hand to the paper, bypassing the brain. Nobody's really hearing, absorbing or comprehending. Then when they look back at their notes that night, it's completely foreign to them."

Don was no nerd, and the babes dug him, so I followed his lead and gave his method a shot. School became a breeze, and my grades soared: I graduated high school with a B-plus average. I didn't just blindly accept everything the teacher said, either; if I disagreed with something, I'd challenge him. Good teachers will not only tolerate your questions, they'll welcome them, knowing that one of their most important functions is to make students think. Facts are subject to interpretation, and your perspective on the Vietnam War, for instance, may differ from your teacher's—but it's every bit as valid. Don't let teachers frighten you. Voice your opinions.

And if something isn't clear to you, ask questions. It's the only way to learn. Sometimes in class you'll glance around and see students whose eyes appear to have glazed over. They don't have a clue to what's going on, but they're afraid to ask questions because they might embarrass themselves. If you feel that way, approach your teacher after class; or if you're having a real problem, ask for some after-school tutoring. If you don't understand the basic principles of a topic, the longer you wait, the more lost you'll become as the school year progresses and the curriculum intensifies.

Report-Card Blues

We'll discuss in chapter 11, Career and College, how your future job will, I hope, be one in which you can express your individuality. But it is not the sole barometer of the person you are. Likewise with grades. Getting a D minus in English Lit doesn't mean that you're a D minus as a human being. (Well, you might be, but that's just a coincidence.) It won't be inscribed on your headstone for all the world to see once you've passed on to the great study hall in the sky. It

doesn't mean that you're dumb. It means that at this point in time you don't understand the subject matter. That's all.

If you're having trouble with a course, obviously you have to work harder at it. But don't neglect the subjects and hobbies you're good at. You need to maintain a sense of perspective—the overall picture of your strengths and weaknesses—and one failure does not make you a failure. Two failures do. (Just kidding.)

Also, don't write off a subject as impossible. There are plenty of people who struggled with a particular course in high school, only to excel at it in college. Low marks may suggest a lack of understanding of or interest in a topic, but they may also be the result of a poor teacher.

It's a generally accepted fact that the quality of education in American schools has dipped in recent years. Between 1963 and the beginning of this decade, verbal scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT, which you take at the end of your junior year in high school) fell over fifty points, and math scores, forty. One reason may be that many talented people have been discouraged from entering the teaching profession by the relatively low salaries offered and the general lack of respect given to teachers. Considering the importance of education, when unskilled laborers can earn more than teachers, it makes you think that maybe our priorities are a little out of whack.

Throughout school you will have both good teachers and bad teachers. I'm sorry to say that it's much easier for me to recall the bad ones than the good, because the good were so few and far between.

What makes a teacher good? Despite what many of your friends may think, good doesn't necessarily mean easy. Some of the best teachers you will ever have are those who may also be the most demanding. A good teacher makes learning interesting and communicates a passion for the subject. A good teacher can inspire teenagers and have a lasting impact on their life. I have excellent memories of my high school choir instructor, Ms. Edwards, who took a special interest in her students and encouraged them musically. She was really cool and made it exciting to sing classical music, which is something normally looked down on by most kids. Not at Baldwin High. She instilled in her students such an enthusiasm for singing, we had nearly two hundred kids in the choir; dlrtbags, druggies, intellectuals, jocks, rah-rah types, nerds. Choir became awesome because she made it awesome, and even those who weren't in choir would stop in after school to watch our rehearsals. To do what this teacher did is a gift.

Unfortunately, it's a gift that many teachers don't have. Maybe they get discouraged by the students' lack of interest or feel like they're stagnating after so many years of teaching the same stuff over

and over to kids who seem—to them, at least— increasingly more difficult to handle. Whatever the reason, they stop caring anymore and just go through the motions, which is something kids can sense. And the same way that a good teacher can inspire you, a bad one can turn you off to a class you might otherwise enjoy. If you get stuck with one of these teachers, don't let them dampen your enthusiasm for the course. Do what you have to do, even if it means educating yourself in the library, and hope that next term you'll have an instructor who cares about his subject matter and his students.

Like parents, teachers do not have an easy job. Like parents, they are not perfect and make mistakes. Like your peers, some make unfair snap judgments. I had a teacher who, the first day of class, took one look at me and pronounced me a "hood," which basically means dirtbag. For the rest of the term, that's how I was treated. I always lost respect for teachers who labeled students or who designated one kid as the class idiot. If he gave a wrong answer, the instructor's reaction wouldn't be just to that one answer, it'd be to all his wrong answers that had preceded it. You'd think that as adults they'd know better, but as you will learn—if you haven't already—adulthood is no guarantee of sensibleness.

Probably the worst teacher I ever had christened our entire class dummies. He was a science teacher, Mr. Pomigrani, who had totally given up on teaching and was as bored as most of his students. I didn't realize this at the time because the dude was incredibly funny. When someone would give an answer that was particularly stupid, he'd go to the connecting classroom and bring in the other teacher as a witness. Sometimes he'd drag in the entire class, too, have the person sheepishly repeat his incorrect answer, and the whole place would roll with laughter. Since he expected us to be stupid, it reached a point where we were the stupidest class, bar none. And we were proud of it.

Now, within our class of dunces, Mr. Pomigrani had appointed one kid the idiot supreme: Len Tremus, this long-haired space cadet who would remind you of Sean Penn's Jeff Spicoli character from the movie Fast Times at Ridgemont High. Len always had the best excuses for not having his homework: "Well" he'd begin in his sort of catatonic (not a drink made from cats) drawl, "I didn't have any paper, right? So I did it on one of those brown paper towels from the boys' bathroom, right? And, like, on my way to school this morning I felt a big, hairy sneeze coming on, and without even thinking, I whipped out the brown piece of paper from my pocket and, like, sneezed all over my homework!" His alibis were such pieces of work, Mr. Pomigrani would throw up his hands in exasperation and let him off the hook. But not before calling in the teacher and students from next door.

In class Len had the same answer for every question asked of him:

"nuclear fission." It didn't matter what the topic was— "Len, what's the capital of Norway?"—the answer was a predictable, crowd-pleasing “nuclear fission?" You'd be discussing the molecular properties of carbon dioxide, and Mr. P., in a sadistic mood, would quickly spin around. "And the answer, Len?"

"Uh, nuclear fission?" And everyone would laugh, including Len.

Finally one day in class we were talking about—you guessed it, gang—nuclear fission. "And the answer, Len?"

"Uh, nuclear fission?" Home run! The place went absolutely berserk, with Mr. P. bringing in the teacher and class from next door (naturally) to behold this momentous event: Len Tremus actually answering a question correctly. There were rumors around school that even the President placed a call to congratulate him.

It seemed funny at the time, but it wasn't, really. Because of this teacher and others like him, Len lived down to everyone's expectations of him. By giving wrong answers he received attention, so he continued to give wrong answers. Maybe he figured that since Mr. Pomigrani had labeled him a meathead, it wasn’t worth trying to prove him wrong. I've often wondered what Len is doing today. He's probably a science teacher or, better yet, a nuclear physicist.

I think that teachers could be more sensitive, that they should remember and learn from their own experiences as students. But like so many adults they forget—or maybe want to forget—what being young was like. For example, why doesn't someone devise a way to choose up sides in phys ed class so that the same couple of kids don't constantly suffer the humiliation of being picked last? You know the bit: "All right *[grumble]*, we'll take Edelstein *[protests from teammates]*, but then we get spotted a couple of runs..." It's really unnecessary.

What do you do if you feel a teacher is picking on you unfairly? You'd probably like to punch him in the mouth, but I say confront him after class or after school. It's possible that he just doesn't realize how his making an example of you or provoking laughs at your expense upsets you. If that doesn't get results, complain to your parents. Not all will act on your behalf, and some may not even believe you, but it's worth a try. I think that most teachers don't consciously try to make your life miserable, but they have so many students that they sometimes lose sight of the power their criticisms or comments can have.

Useless Information

How many times have you sat in class, flipped through your notes and thought to yourself how irrelevant the subject matter seemed. "I'm going to beauty school after I graduate," you gripe, "so what use am I

going to have for Edgar Allan Poe's poems? Quote The Raven to my customers as I give them a manicure?"

It's true that some of what we learn in school is never directly applied in our daily lives. However, all knowledge is helpful in some way. Even courses that you don't think you'll ever use in the future can prepare you to disagree or to analyze, which are skills you'll use every day of your life. And don't forget that your career goals may change drastically over the course of your life, and that subjects which bored you to tears in junior high or high school may interest you later on. It happens, even if not very often.

1 think that one way to make school more enjoyable is to get involved in some kind of extracurricular activity: Act in a play, participate in a sport, join a club—all those things that, when they are suggested by your parents, cause you to roll your eyes and harrumph. Because I always held down an after-school job. I only had time to join choir. Looking back, I really wish I could have gone out for one of the teams. Some good things were happening at school after hours.

Education is more than just ingesting information; it should involve experiences outside class and working with and relating to others. It's been shown in studies that kids who have no friends or hobbies but who study obsessively eventually suffer what's called burnout: They become physically and mentally exhausted and lose their motivation. So *that's* what happened to Len Tremus!

Why Do They Call It Sheepskin Anyway?

If you're really miserable or frustrated with school, there are alternatives you can explore to make your education more meaningful and better tailored to your abilities. Many school districts offer work-study programs, in which you receive additional credit for work experience; independent study, in which you get credit for completing a project such as a research paper, a painting or a sculpture (How about writing a song, mmm?); early graduation, by taking a test; and advanced college credits, either at your high school or at a participating local college. Talk with your guidance counselor to learn about your district's alternative-education programs.

The bottom line on school is this: As dull and tedious as it can be, without a high school diploma you're almost certainly condemning yourself to a life of dull, tedious—and mostly low-paying—employment, with few exceptions to that rule. The facts, Jack, are that high school grads earn an average of approximately 30 percent more per year than do nongrads, and for women the discrepancy is even greater. You dislike school? Join the club. You don't have to enjoy it, just put up with it until you graduate. Get your diploma. That rolled-

up piece of paper doesn't mean you're smarter than someone without it, but just pit a high school grad and a nongrad against each other for the same job, and see who winds up with a paycheck at the end of the week. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it's not going to be the dropout.

If you have dropped out, as does nearly one in four teenagers, you can earn a high school equivalency diploma by taking the General Educational Development Exam, or GED. It's a 290-question, six-hour-and-forty-five-minute test developed by the American Council on Education that appraises your reading writing, social studies, science and mathematics skills, with eligibility requirements and passing grades varying depending on where you live (so move to where it's easiest). To find out where the exam is held and where study courses are offered in your community, contact the American Council on Education, 1 Dupont Circle, Suite 20, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 939-9490.

Crises

It's so hard to do it all yourself, Fighting for your dreams alone. When the toy's upon the highest shelf A child's tears soon become stone. Oh, why does no one lend a hand? Why does no one understand Why I need to make a stand? It's so hard to carry on When all your hope is gone And all your dreams have come undone,

- "I believe in you," Twisted Sister

9. Problems with Parents with Problems

We spend so much of our lives thinking that our parents are special, we often forget they are regular people. And people, whether they have kids or not, have problems. Some are minor, but others are quite serious. Parents who have problems often create crises for their children. For one thing, a parent's problem is usually a family problem. (I hope you're following this, 'cause I'm lost.)

When patents divorce

Your parents have just broken the news to you: They're getting a divorce. You're blown away. Your family has just become a statistic, and you've suddenly become one of the 12.6 million children living in homes marked by divorce.

Kids whose parents break up often feel disillusioned, angry and afraid. At a time when your life is undergoing so many changes, this is just what you needed, right? Divorce is always hard, but it's even more difficult on today's families, which are smaller and often miles away from supportive relatives. Divorce happens when one or both parents realize that the other person is not the one they wish to spend their lives with. How can that be if they were so in love when they married?

First off, your mother and father are individuals, and people do change. Look at yourself. Are you the same person you were just a year ago? No. You've sown new interests, weeded out old ones, cultivated new friendships. (Hey, is this a book on teenagerhood or an agricultural report?) Though adults change less abruptly than teenagers do, over the course of many years two partners may grow together or apart from each other.

You can't blame someone for falling out of love. It's difficult to say why it happens, just as it's hard to put into words why we fall in love. One thing is certain: It's not your fault, although sometimes teenagers, desperate to put responsibility somewhere, blame themselves unfairly. Your parents may have married because of you, but they aren't divorcing because of you.

Years ago divorce was considered sinful by many religions, and so unhappy couples rarely separated; they remained together—unhappily. Today there is less stigma attached to divorce, enabling couples to split and search for marital fulfillment with a mate who is better suited to them at this point in their lives. That's a positive change, for why should people stay together if they're making each other miserable? But I wonder sometimes if today's couples don't view

divorce too casually. I know people who, on their wedding day, have remarked to me half-jokingly, "If it doesn't work out, we'll get a divorce." Just like that. Listen, in every relationship there are going to be trouble spots, times of uneven growth, and to survive them requires a great deal of giving and taking. Maybe today too many people are interested only in the taking, which is one reason why the divorce rate is a staggering 40 percent.

Still, I don't believe that anybody welcomes a separation or a divorce. Well, maybe a couple of people, but then, they get off on rug burns. For most men and women it is painful. During your teenage years you learn a lot about values and how to handle certain situations from your parents. This is one example they are not too proud of setting.

Child Custody and Your Rights

Since no one can be in two places at the same time, and your parents will be living separately, where you will live becomes an issue. The parent who has the basic responsibility for you has what's called custody, of which there are five types:

• *Sole custody*. This is where one parent Is awarded the responsibility of raising the child, with the other parent providing some financial support and being allowed visiting privileges. Ninety percent of all child custody cases are decided this way, with the child residing with the mother in nine of ten cases.

• Joint custody—Here the child lives with one parent most of the year, but both parents share in all decisions about the child's upbringing.

• Divided—The child lives with one parent for a set period—maybe a week, a few days, or several months, then with the other.

• Split—If more than one child is involved, siblings are split up between the two parents.

• Birdnesting—In this fairly new arrangement both the father and the mother have their own places but take turns living in the family house with the children.

In most cases the child-custody arrangement is decided upon out of court by the two parents. Only rarely is the decision left to a family court judge, Until recently the child's feelings weren't really considered but now family courts often appoint a law guardian or attorney to represent the child's rights. If your parents have gone to court over custody rights and no attorney has been appointed on your behalf, request that the judge appoint one for you.

You don't need to be legally represented to say which parent you want to live with. Usually the judge will call you into his or her

chamber and discuss the situation with you. In custody cases the main priority for all concerned is doing what is in the best interests of the child, though at the time you probably find that pretty hard to believe.

It is important for your future and happiness that you make your desires known, even if you fear hurting one parent's feelings. Most moms and dads realize that your decision isn't simply a matter of which parent you like or love more. Perhaps your father has moved to another town, and to live with him would mean transferring to a new school and leaving your friends behind. Not all, but most parents understand this. Even though your mother and father may no longer love each other, they will always love you.

Dealing with Your Parents (Preferably from the Bottom of the Deck)

The first year to eighteen months following a separation or divorce are full of problems. As the changed family finds its own rhythm and reorganizes, old routines ranging from holiday traditions to family meals often break down.

With your father no longer living at home, as is usually the case, you may feel you require more attention from your mother. But she may still be emotionally upset from the breakup of the marriage and not be as attentive as you'd like. Lots of divorced women have symptoms of depression and distress. As if that's not enough, because of financial pressure, a nonworking mother may need to find a job. On the other side of the demilitarized zone, the displaced dad may take the separation harder than the mom. He feels rootless and misses not seeing you, his kids, all the time.

Never allow either parent to use you as a messenger—"Tell your father I need money for repairs"—or try to turn you against the other. Furthermore, neither parent should make you feel that if you love one parent, the other won't love you. It's common for one or both parents to resent the other, but it is unfair of them to place you in the middle; which they often do. If your parents do this to you, and it makes you uncomfortable, let them know. It may do some good, it may not. Many times they are unaware of their conduct and will back off once you tell them it upsets you. If they persist in their behavior, just be aware of what they're doing, and do your best to hang in there and not be manipulated or used.

Try not to be afraid to express your feelings to your parents about things like visitation rights. For example, if your father's regular visiting day is every Saturday, but you want to go shopping with your friend one weekend instead, explain this to him. Tactfully. "Dad, you

know I love you, but could we skip this weekend?" Offer a substitute day, or ask if you can bring your friend along.

Just as you in no way caused your parents' separation or divorce, don't kid yourself that if you plot and scheme, you can get them back together. Some teenagers believe that if they are really, really good or really, really bad or get really, really sick, their parents will reunite out of love for them. Forget it; it doesn't work.

When Parents Start Dating (Make Sure They're Home by Ten)

Too weird. When your parents were married, you found it inconceivable that they actually "did it" together. Now your mother is dating and is acting like a schoolgirl with a crush. We rarely think of our parents as sexual beings—for that matter, we rarely think of them as human beings—and so it's normal to feel uncomfortable initially. It is also normal to feel a bit resentful and jealous of your parent's new love interest, for all of a sudden your parent may no longer be giving you his or her full attention.

You may even feel protective of your parent. (For instance: "Dad, are you using protection?") Your parents are probably highly aware of this and are anxious over your response to their dating and dates. How's that for a role reversal? It almost makes the pain of divorce worth it.

The odds are that you won't like everybody your parents date, but keep in mind that while you'll be out of the house in a few years, your parents' next marriages may endure for the rest of their lives. For most of this chapter I've urged you to do what is best for you and to think primarily of yourself. In this case, however, keep your parents' happiness in mind as well, for you all want to be happy again. Sometimes teenagers try too hard to be a son or a daughter to a "prospective" mother or father—their parent's dates. The danger here is that these romances may be only casual, and when the relationship breaks up, you've suffered another loss.

Seventy-five percent of divorced people—slightly more men than women—remarry within five years. When one parent remarries and the other is still single, old wounds may resurface and arguments increase for a time, with mothers tending to be more disapproving of a father's new spouse. For you, a parent's remarriage means still more adjustments.

Stepparents and stepfamilies

As if you didn't have enough grief dealing with your biological

parents, now you've got one or two new parents to deal with. Stepparents bring with them a whole new set of unique problems. Hang in there.

A stepparent is essentially a stranger. Just because your mother or father loves this person doesn't mean that you have to. It is unrealistic for anyone to think that you will relate to a stepparent as if he or she were your natural parent—especially at first—and just as unrealistic to assume that stepparents will care for you the same way they care for their own children. But that doesn't mean you can't have a close relationship or friendship. With any luck you will learn to love your stepparent and see in him or her what your parent sees. It will just be a different kind of love from the kind you have for your real mother and father.

Once again, with the arrival of a stepparent, household routines are disrupted. The types of foods prepared for meals may be different, and maybe your new stepfather isn't as tolerant of music videos on the TV as your real father is. Suddenly you're living with a person, or persons, whose last name is different from yours, a daily reminder of the split that occurred in your family. Stepparents may try to impose their values or rules on you, and they may be drastically different from what you are used to. And if you and your parent move into the stepparent's home, you're probably going to feel like a stranger in a strange land for a while. But don't worry: a few Twisted Sister posters, some throw pillows, and your room will feel like home.

Where stepparents and stepkids are concerned, somebody is going to feel like an outsider, and it's not always the kids. Your stepparent is aware that there's a whole part of your life that he or she can never be part of or replace, and at times stepparents can even feel jealous of the special memories you and your parent share. Especially if they really want to become a part of your life.

Just as I asked you to go easy on some parents in chapter 7, look at the problems some stepparents face: They are eager for you to like them (sometimes too eager), but at the same time feel they must discipline you, knowing full well you are probably going to resent them for it. "Who are you to tell me what to do? You're not my real father/mother!" is a typical answer to a scolding stepparent. Some stepparents were childless before marrying your parent and have now become instant mothers or lathers, not to an infant but to an adolescent. It's not the easiest job, and in many ways stepparenting is a role that requires a juggler's skills. Just as with parents, it is important that you keep the lines of communication open. Try to make your stepparents feel they are part of your life, By the same token, if you think a stepparent is bossing you around unfairly, for example, try to talk honestly with him about your grievance. Make

him or her understand that you are trying to build a good, honest relationship. Your stepparent probably worries about the relationship just as much as you do.

Whole families moving in with each other is like a cheap suit -— will it hold together? Whether you are the party that has moved or been invaded, this requires another major adjustment. (If you haven't been keeping score, that's about a dozen major adjustments so far.) Now you are surrounded by additional strangers: stepbrothers and/or stepsisters. Your rank in the family can change instantly: You may have been the oldest child when you lived with your natural parents; now you're the second youngest. Or you may suddenly have younger brothers and sisters, whereas before you were the baby of the family. That's some change.

It's always preferable that two merging families begin their life together in a new home where territories aren't laid out, but unfortunately, dudes and dudettes, that is rarely possible. As always, problems will arise—perhaps you feel your stepparent favors his or her children when it comes to assigning household chores—and should be discussed. I realize that all of this "discussing" is easier said than done, but at least if you make an effort to improve things, nobody can blame you for not having tried.

On the surface it may seem as if divorce, stepparents and stepfamilies cause nothing but problems. Yet there are many teenagers who have welcomed the change in their lives, such as only children who enjoy living with stepsiblings, or kids who love their stepparents.

When parents are abusive

In ancient Rome children were considered to be their parents' property and could be sold, abandoned or killed at the parents' discretion. (Safety tip: Don't move to Rome.) Even in some states in this country, child disobedience used to be punishable by death. Society's attitudes toward children have become more civilized over the years, but we still have a long way to go.

Since the 1960s all fifty states have adopted laws to protect kids from parents who fail to meet minimal standards of parental responsibility. Still, nearly two million children under eighteen are abused each year in the United States, with between three thousand and five thousand dying from abuse-related injuries. How is this possible?

Just as there are so-called bad kids, there are bad parents: parents with whom you cannot communicate and who are incapable of providing the acceptance, affection, approval, protection, guidance and discipline that every child has a right to expect from his mom and

dad. Incompetent parents. You know— assholes.

Children start with a deep trust of adults, but with some adults that trust is misplaced. As you will gradually find out, adulthood is no guarantee of maturity. Some adults are merely larger, older children with more power. Some parents are no wiser than their teenagers. Some parents never should have had children.

As you can probably tell from reading the papers or watching television, people really wig out every time a little kid is abused. But teenagers don't usually receive the same sympathy from society, which generally associates child abuse with preadolescents. Partly this attitude comes from the general suspicion of teenagers; if a teen is abused, it is often assumed that he or she "deserved" it. Teenagers, society believes, can take care of themselves. Yet fewer than one in five teenagers ever strike their parents back. (Hey, I'm finally part of a majority!)

Many cases of abuse go unreported because people find it hard to believe that a parent could harm his or her own child. What kind of parent would do such a thing? Studies have shown that as many as 75 percent of all abusive adults were abused themselves as children, or their childhood lacked warmth and affection. They are usually insecure, distrustful people who isolate themselves and their family from others. They are overly critical of their children and rarely talk about them positively. Nearly half abuse drugs or alcohol.

Forms of Abuse (Pick Your Favorite)

The government defines child abuse and neglect as "the mental or physical injury, sexual abuse and exploitation, negligent treatment of a child under the age of eighteen, or the age specified by the child-protection law of the state in question." (I guess no one in the government has ever heard about run-on sentences. Sheesh!)

Physical abuse is the easiest to detect, with victims bearing evidence of beatings: welts, bruises, scars, burns, lost teeth. Less visible, but just as harmful, are the emotional scars, including frequent problems with behavior and learning; lower IQs; fear of physical contact with others; and extremely aggressive or passive behavior.

Sexual abuse affects young girls almost exclusively, although there are instances of homosexual abuse and, rarely, of boys being sexually abused by their mothers. In nearly 80 percent of all abuse cases, the abuser is a trusted adult. The American Psychological Association found that as many as twelve million to fifteen million women and girls are victims of incest, which is intercourse between parent and child, or between siblings, and is illegal.

Sexual abuse includes not only rape, or intercourse against a

woman's will, but non-touching abuse such as voyeurism (sexual gratification through seeing nudity or sex acts) and exhibitionism (exposing one's genitals to others), and touching and fondling.

The typical sex abuse family is one in which the members hold traditional roles: The father is the absolute head of the household and the breadwinner. The mother is discouraged from getting involved in activities outside the home, and even the daughter may be discouraged from socializing with friends or dating. The father, the mother or both are often substance abusers and the mother is frequently a physical- or sexual-abuse victim herself.

Moat of the time the male parent physically forces himself on the daughter, but just as bad are those who psychologically manipulate, either through fear—"Go ahead and tell; no one will believe you anyway"—or seduction—"A good girl would want to please her father"—lavishing the daughter with gifts and special privileges. If the daughter complains of her father's behavior to her mother, sometimes the mother doesn't believe her. Mothers in such families are generally uneducated, without job skills, and are totally dependent on the husband for support. They fear jeopardizing their financial stability, food, shelter and so on. Imagine the psychological effects such abuse has on a young girl. Emotional disturbances, excessive nervousness, a tendency to cry easily, poor self-esteem and sexual problems are common.

Emotional abuse is the most widespread form of abuse and is the most difficult to prove, because there are no visible scars. But it can be as severe and have longer-lasting effects than those of physical or sexual abuse. Emotional abusers are often overly harsh and rejecting parents who constantly criticize their child, withhold physical affection and in general fail to provide the necessary guidance. Punishments such as locking the child in a dark closet or cellar are typical. Emotional maltreatment damages a child's learning ability and general development, and causes extremely aggressive or withdrawn behavior. As many as forty million children are neglect victims, deprived of adequate clothing, food, protection and medical attention. Neglected children are often hungry, sometimes show signs of malnutrition, are unclean and unkempt.

All abuse victims are vulnerable because of their physical dependency on their parents. Many have been abused since childhood. Having grown up in this violent, hateful atmosphere all their lives, they don't always realize that they are abuse victims. They think a hard slap or a punch is normal punishment. Because they are frequently made to feel worthless and responsible for the family's problems, they minimize the beatings or believe they deserved them. To emphasize the potential damage done by child abuse, check this

out: According to one survey, 85 percent of the inmates in the nation's prisons come from homes pockmarked by abuse. Convicted murderers Charles Manson, Lee Harvey Oswald, James Earl Ray and Sirhan Sirhan were all abused children. This doesn't mean the answer for abused teens is to resort to crime, the answer is to do something about it.

While more than half of neglect cases are reported to authorities, nearly three fourths of all physical, sexual and emotional abuse cases go unreported. The reasons are that other adults are usually hesitant to get involved because of embarrassment, ignorance of what constitutes abuse, fear of interfering or fear of reprisal from the parents.

If You Are an Abuse Victim

If you are being physically, sexually or emotionally abused, or neglected, you probably feel helpless, that there is no one to whom you can turn. But there is.

You do not have to put up with abusive parents. If there is an adult you feel comfortable confiding in, tell him or her immediately. Aw, c'mon, there's got to be one. It can be a neighbor, a relative, a family friend, your doctor or your teacher. He or she can file a report with your state's Child Abuse and Maltreatment Reporting Center (the exact name of the agency may vary), which is a lot of help. The toll-free phone number is listed in the Yellow Pages under "Health and Human Services," or in the White Pages Community Services Numbers. For victims of sexual abuse, most states have either rape or sex-crime hot lines, the numbers of which are also in the Community Services Numbers. (Yes, I do spend a lot of time studying local directories; so what's it to you?)

If you don't feel comfortable confiding in another adult, call the number yourself. So long as a report is made to authorities in good faith, the reporter is immune from civil or criminal liability; that is, you can't get in any trouble. As big a step as it may seem to pick up the phone and call, do it. Don't permit fear to keep you in a home where you are being abused.

What Happens to Abused Children?

The Child Abuse and Maltreatment Reporting Center immediately sends a worker to investigate the claim; in a case in which the teenager is considered to be in immediate danger, within twenty-four hours, and if what they suspect is true, they will place the teen in

protective custody. Your family doctor, the police, selected social service agency employees, hospital administrators and agents from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCC) can also take twenty-four-hour protective custody if imminent danger is apparent.

If abuse is found to exist, the agency will first arrange for family counseling, to try to solve its problems. If counseling appears to be futile, or if the teen's health is endangered, the State Department of Social Services will arrange for protective custody for the teen either at a relative's, neighbor's or friend's home, or with foster parents. Foster parents are adults who receive money from the state to care for children, They are recruited, licensed, trained and supervised by a state social worker. In other words, "They be chilly," and even if they're not, they certainly can't be worse than abusive parents.

The agency will do its best to encourage the family to remain intact and to work out its problems; removing the teenager from the home is a last resort. If the agency finds that permanently returning the abused kid to his real family is impossible, he will be placed permanently with an adoptive family, with the foster parents given first shot at keeping a happening dude or dudette such as yourself.

If you are being abused by a parent, get help for yourself at once by calling the agencies noted earlier in this chapter. If you know of someone who is being abused at home, show them this chapter and encourage them to help themselves. Be forewarned, however, that although these organizations are devoted to helping kids in trouble, many are bureaucracies that may not move as quickly as you'd like them to. Most of the people you will speak to are warm and caring, but once in a while you'll contact somebody who's having a bad day and sounds cold or surly. Don't give up seeking help; ask to speak to somebody else. Not all of these avenues are going to pan out for you, but many will be able to provide assistance and services.

When Parents Are Substance Abusers

The increase in drug and alcohol abuse extends to adults as well as teenagers. Some of these adults are parents. Some may be your parents.

Though your parents may seem grown-up and respectable, they may still have the more liberal attitudes toward drugs and drink they developed when they were young. Most adults know that drinking too much and using drugs are not compatible with being a responsible adult and especially are not compatible with being a parent. Yet there are mothers and fathers who abuse these substances and/or encourage their teenagers to indulge along with them. And to think that in my day the family vice was badminton.

My own parents were not big drinkers. My father would occasionally have a beer, but to this day I've never seen him drunk. (Come to think of it, it might be funny to check out, once.) My mother sometimes has a glass of wine with dinner—we call her the wino of the family. Basically they're both social drinkers, holding one mixed drink for the length of a party. In that sense— and to their credit—my siblings and I received very healthy messages from my parents.

If you had a problem with either alcohol or drugs, most of you could count on support from your parents to help you overcome your addiction. But when parents abuse liquor or drugs and need help, their children are basically helpless to aid them. To begin with, kids may not know that one or both parents even have a problem. As many as 40 percent of children whose parents were alcoholics claim they didn't recognize the problem until they were out of their teens and on their own. I think that in some of those cases they were simply denying the obvious to themselves.

Alcoholism is a disease that affects the entire family, even if just one member drinks. It is important that you try to learn all you can about the disease. But it is even more important to understand your reactions to a parent's drinking. Al-Anon, a group of adults and children affected by a family member's drinking, has published much literature on the emotions you are likely to feel if a parent is an alcohol abuser.

• **Obsession**—You become fixated with devising ways to get your parent to quit drinking. In school your mind wanders from the blackboard to your father's alcoholism. (We're saying father here, but keep in mind that plenty of mothers are alcoholics too.) What can you do to make him stop? Maybe you try to hide his bottles of liquor, which is usually ineffective, for the compulsive drinker will simply buy more.

• **Anxiety**—You try to cover up Dad's problem, lying to your friends when they ask why he's asleep at three o'clock in the afternoon. "He's the lead singer for a rock & roll band, Shell heh," you say, though the reality is that he came home loaded real late last night. Eventually you stop having your friends come over after school or on weekends at all. You're just too humiliated. Let's face it: Dads and moms can be embarrassing enough when they're sober. You're also scared because alcoholism is a deadly disease, with the life expectancy of an alcoholic adult being twelve years shorter than that of a nondrinker. You continue to worry, and your father continues to drink.

• **Anger**—You become enraged each time your father vows he is going to quit drinking, because by this time you realize his promises—like his liquor bottles—are empty. Or you become furious when you

learn that Dad got fired again for drinking on the job. You also start wondering what sort of father could do this to his children. Obviously one who doesn't love them very much, you think. You feel hurt.

• **Denial**—You want the problem to go away so badly that you begin to accept your father's deceptions as the truth. Dad says, “I’ve cut down on my drinking, I really have," and you believe him, even though in your heart you know he is lying. And if your father does stay sober for a few days or a few weeks, you breathe a sigh of relief now that the problem is over. Except that it's not over, and you know it.

• **Guilt**—The most severe problem is guilt: the chronic, false belief that somehow you are responsible for your parent's drinking. Perhaps if you were better-behaved, smarter, more attractive—you're not even sure just what—your father would not be an alcoholic. (Yeah, right. And if I had three wheels, I'd be a tricycle.) That is an awesome weight for c anyone to have to carry, and the psychological damage can be brutal.

The Alcoholic Family

Family life in a home where a parent is an alcoholic is unpredictable. The mood of each evening depends on the alcoholic parent's behavior. Will he be sober? A happy drunk? An abusive drunk? Forty percent of all child abuse, covered earlier in this chapter, involves alcohol.

Meals where all family members are present are rare in an alcoholic's household, and even when the alcoholic is there, he's not really all there. Besides the instability of the alcoholic's schedule, many times the children begin to stay out later or eat at a friend's—anything to avoid returning home. The family usually gets pulled into the charade of pretending nothing is wrong to the outside world, often enforced by the parents: "Don't tell anyone about your father." The children are usually pushed into growing up too quickly, having to be the man or woman of the house in the absence of the alcoholic parent;'

And holidays – normally joyful occasions – become horror shows, the festivities usually degenerating within a few hours once the alcoholic begins to drink—with a built-in excuse, too: It's a holiday!

How Children of Alcoholics Are Affected

1. They feel different or isolated from everybody else, which is understandable, since they're confronted by an abnormal situation at home.

2. They feel they have to be in constant control of themselves and others; this is not surprising, since their home life is so out of control and they have more responsibilities at home than do most teens. Instead of "Did you take out the garbage," it's "Did you pay the utility bill?" They never know if they're going to return from school to learn that their father has been involved in a car accident or if the furniture has been repossessed because he failed to make a payment.

3. They are distrustful, feeling that if they can't even trust their own parents, who, then, can they rely on?

4. They feel unnecessarily ashamed or embarrassed. Other kids can sometimes make cruel remarks.

5. They have low self-esteem, believing falsely that if they were a better person, their parent would stop drinking. They are approval seekers who feel guilty about standing up for themselves. (Hey, wait a minute! I have all of the above problems, and my parents are sober. I must really be messed up.)

The greatest impact a parent's alcoholism has on a teenager is that it may start unhealthy attitudes about liquor, drug and food consumption. More than half of all alcoholics had alcoholic parents, and many children of alcoholics have other substance-abuse problems, with drugs or with food.

And check this out: More than half of all daughters of alcoholics marry alcoholics. The model of marriage they've been exposed to is one in which the wife coddles, nurses and picks up after the alcoholic. They confuse love and pity and know no other way of marriage. Some of them come to crave the constant crises involved with loving an alcoholic. Marrying an alcoholic —sounds like lots of fun, doesn't it? Getting to meet interesting liquor-store owners, visiting exciting rehabilitation clinics and hospital emergency rooms. Come on, wake up and smell the vomit.

Finally, it is also not unusual for children of alcoholics to become promiscuous, as they search for the affection missing at home.

Where to Go for Help

For you, not your parent. We've already discussed in chapter 6 the alcohol-abuse treatment centers available for problem drinkers. The help we're talking about here is for those affected by another person's alcoholism.

First, it is important that you find another adult you can talk to about your parent's problem. You may be able to confide in your nonalcoholic parent, but usually in alcoholic households, that parent is so busy coddling and nursing, he or she neglects the children. Talk to a neighbor, a teacher, a friend's parent; anyone with whom you feel

comfortable and with whom you can be honest Again, think real hard; there must be someone you can unload on.

In addition to the Al-Anon organization, there is Alateen, which was established in 1957 by a teenager who was agonizing over his father's drinking. Probably the most valuable knowledge you'll gain from Alateen is that you are not alone. You'll also learn how to detach yourself from your parent's problem while still loving him or her, so that you can carry on with your own life.

This is especially important because you will be leaving home in a few years, and once you do, you will probably feel freer than you ever have. Getting caught up in your drinking parent's problems or getting yourself in trouble because of your home situation is not the answer. You may not always have to live with your parents, but you will always have to live with yourself. And you never know what lies ahead. (I don't know about you, but I smell an inspirational poster in the making here.)

There are more than 23,000 Al-Anon and 3,000 Alateen groups in over eighty countries throughout the world. Teenagers may attend Al-Anon Family Groups meetings, but adults may not intrude on Alateen meetings, comprised of kids from alcoholic families, who compare their feelings and experiences. All members are anonymous if they wish to be, and there is no membership fee, although contributions are accepted. For more information on Alateen and Al-Anon, addresses and phone numbers, turn to the Help Yourself chapter at the back of this book.

Al-Anon, Alateen and Ovaltine. Three great institutions.

When a parent or a loved one dies

I consider myself fortunate never to have had anyone in my immediate family pass away. Three of my grandparents died: my father's father when I was twelve, and my mother's mom and dad when I was nineteen and twenty-five, respectively. Naturally, I was very sad.

The older you get, the more you will experience death. First it's those your grandparents' age, then those your parents' age, then people your own age. Whether it is the result of an accident or an illness, it is especially upsetting when a young person dies.

I know from others it has happened to that losing a parent when you're still a kid is the greatest tragedy that can occur, with the possible exception of a parent losing a child. Losing a sibling, a friend, an uncle, can be very traumatic. Hey, losing your wallet can be pretty annoying too. The point is, it's impossible to gauge beforehand how you will feel after someone close to you passes away. Some people I

know who thought they would fall to pieces were quite strong; others, who are normally stoic and rarely display their emotions, grieved long and hard.

The effect a person's death will have on you depends on many things, such as the quality of your relationship with the deceased. If you had a tight, warm rapport, while of course you miss the person deeply, you are strengthened by the knowledge of your closeness and reminded constantly of that person's presence by your good feelings about him or her. Those good feelings will never go away. Your outlook on death in general will also determine how you will feel. If you accept it as a part of life, you will by and large have an easier time dealing with the loss of a loved one. It has been said that just as we do not know exactly when we are conceived, perhaps we do not know our end. (Who says that Chinese fortune cookies don't have any real value?)

All major contemporary religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, believe in some form of hereafter, or life after death, and there are many theories as to what happens to people's spirits, or souls, after they die. The most common belief is that a spirit, which may be an energy form, leaves the body and continues to exist in another dimension that we can neither see, hear nor feel But we can feel its presence, and do, often.

There have been instances of people who survived clinical death —being declared dead but then being revived—and virtually all claim to have felt a peaceful calmness, or to have sensed themselves "outside" their body, in another plane, without time and form. Could they be describing an afterlife? (Or did they mistakenly drop a quaalude?) i

Although I know little about it—not having died yet—and don't claim to fully understand it, I believe in a hereafter. I think everybody needs to believe that there is something out there greater than themselves to help put things in perspective and to draw comfort from. We human beings have a tendency to take ourselves and our problems very seriously. Too seriously. A person's death can teach us to appreciate the little things in life, not to take others for granted and, something I'm trying harder to do, to express our love to them.

Mourning Is Personal

William Shakespeare wrote, "Everyone can master grief but he that has it." Go, Willy! You may hear from others how long it took them to get over the loss of a grandparent, parent, friend or even a favorite pet. I know I was really broken up when my dog Tippy died when I was fourteen. And I felt very shaken when John Lennon was

assassinated in 1980; it was as if he were a member of my family. Grief is personal, and although the average teenager mourns the loss of a parent for up to six months, for example, whatever it takes you is what it takes. There is no timetable.

There is also no "right" way to mourn. Some people let the tears flow; others mourn silently, acting as if nothing's wrong. Some laugh nervously. The wake for my maternal grandfather sounded like a party; it was unbelievable. The hilarity was so out of control that the funeral-home director had to ask us several times to keep the noise down. At first I thought, This is disgraceful But then I realized that the wake was so frivolous because everybody had such good feelings about my grandfather. He had lived a long, rich life, and although we were sad to lose him, the knowledge that so many people loved him was comforting.

You may even feel anger, not sadness, after a death, which is simply another way of handling it. So don't get down on yourself if you feel nothing at first. Feeling nothing is feeling something, and just because you can't identify your emotions doesn't mean you don't have any.

It's important that you be able to talk to someone: a family member, a friend, anyone. Don't be self-conscious about wanting to express your sadness or laughingly tell a funny story about the deceased. Let others know how you feel. Friends may be uneasy around you at first, not knowing what to say, but sometimes even just hearing "I don't know what to say, but I'm really sorry about your mom" helps a lot. If you feel that you need to talk to a professional bereavement counselor for teenagers, to help you sort out or simply verbalize your feelings, there are a number of professionals to whom you can go: Many schools have a counselor trained in bereavement; there are adolescent counselors; and members of the clergy are often very comforting and helpful. Refer to the Help Yourself chapter at the end of this book for listings of where to turn for help.

At times in this chapter it may seem as if I'm being flippant about serious subjects such as death and parental abuse; that's simply a defense mechanism on my part, my way of handling difficult topics. I believe that laughter is the remedy for many problems and helps people to deal with things. I know it does for me.

10. When It All Seems Too Much

The teen years take more out of you in terms of bodily and mental tension or stress, than at any time during your life. But you m probably already guessed that.

You are somewhere between childhood and adulthood, facing new challenges and new feelings all the time—about yourself, I tour body, other people's bodies, sex, the future. Each step forward you take, each new freedom, causes you to look back over your shoulder at the safety and security of the childhood you are leaving behind. You're excited and restless at the same time.

Then there are the realities of modern living that cause stress: a more mobile society, with people leaving the familiarity of their hometowns to start all over at colleges or at work in new towns; and an increasingly hostile world plagued by terrorism, war and the horrifying prospect of global nuclear destruction. What really scares you is that sometimes you think Armageddon might not be such a bad thing after all. Have a nice day.

There are days when we're burdened with what is called free-floating anxiety. Nothing in particular bothers us; *everything* bothers us. It's "one of those days." My wife will wake up, accidentally spill a bottle of shampoo, and it becomes "one of those days". That sort of mind-set ensures that, indeed, it is going to be one of those days. And she'll drop a glass later on. "I knew it". Because it is just one of those days. You feel butterflies in stomach, your head throbs and you can't for the life of you figure out why you wake up with a stomachache or a headache. This is called a psychosomatic illness. (Psyche is the Greek word for "'mind," soma, for "body," and a tic is where your parents store old clothes.) This is also called a day off from school. Your emotional stress has been transferred, or displaced, and is now a physical disorder. Psychosomatic illnesses are often subconscious cries for attention and affection, a way of telling your parents that you need their love. Calling them on the phone is a lot easier. Also, teenagers who think they are going crazy—and who doesn't at some time or another?—feel less embarrassed asking for medical help than for psychological help. In general, teenagers are susceptible to such illnesses because they are so preoccupied with the changes taking place in their bodies. Every new discovery—a pimple, the onset of menstruation—is a rare, incurable disease, and can we please go to the amusement park one last time before I die, oh, please, can we?

Psychosomatic ailments that linger over a period of time can wreak havoc on a person's well-being, both physically and mentally, and should be treated seriously. Having a psychosomatic illness is not

the same as being a hypochondriac, a person who imagines himself to be sick. Psychosomatic pain is real.

Coping with Stress

It is important that you try not to bottle up your emotions inside. If you're angry at someone, don't hold in the anger until you feel as if you're going to explode, because eventually that anger is going to surface in a display of volcanic fury. This often happens at completely inappropriate moments.

"Good morning, Debbie, and how are you today?"

"&%$!@#%*$#@!" :#t

When I was in my teens, I was a major league internalizer. As ridiculous as it sounds, I was determined never to appear less than cheerful in front of my parents, because I was afraid they would be angry with me. So I hid everything. What a jerk I was!

The tensions in my personal life have diminished over the years, but I deal with a tremendous amount of pressure professionally. Living out of suitcases while on tour for months on end with Twisted Sister can be a strain, and then there's the pressure I face being the band's songwriter and creative head, having to come up with dozens of tunes—both music and lyrics—to choose from for each album, plus video and staging ideas.

To a certain degree I welcome pressure, because it can drive people to accomplish more. The weight I felt when writing the material for the Stay Hungry record, which for Twisted Sister was a do-or-die effort, probably contributed to the intensity of the songs and helped make the album the success it was. There are many reporters and writers who function best when deadline time is near and they're under the gun to finish their story. You may feel highly energized and creative even though you left yourself a mere weekend to write that English term paper. You are responding positively to stress. | 1

My getting involved in music was due largely to the distress I felt from being unpopular and unhappy. I was unable to express myself conventionally, and so my emotions were sublimated; that is, expressed in an acceptable form such as music. If I didn't have rock & roll, it's scary to think about how all my anger and pain would have shown itself. Maybe I'd have become a professional wrestler: Dee "Death from Above" Snider. And each of my opponents would be Red the bully, who tripped me on the softball field so long ago.

Stress and pressure are inescapable parts of life. And the bigger the part you want to play in the world—through a special, important job in which the rewards are greater—the greater the pressures. Don't let stress prevent you from accomplishing things. Attack it. Use it. It's

remarkable how resilient human beings are when confronted with challenges and seemingly impossible tasks. Somehow we manage to do them, and it makes us that much more capable of responding to stress the next time, physically as well as mentally.

Let me tell you how I handle problems. Maybe it's because I dealt with stress for so long as a kid, but I find it's better not to agonize over a problem; let it rest overnight instead. If something's going wrong, I'll go for a swim, a drive, and just forget about it. I'll work on the problem later when I'm feeling mentally alert, with a fresh perspective. It drives my wife crazy. "How can you go to sleep?" she'll want to know. Sometimes, at that moment, there's nothing more that you can do, so why dwell on it?

Don't allow problems to feed on themselves. Let's say you're supposed to be studying for a biology test, but instead you're worrying frantically because for the past two weeks you've been doodling the logos of your favorite rock bands on your notebook instead of paying attention in class. You do have a bit of a problem there, I admit, but freaking out over your minimal notes (nice job of lettering on that Iron Maiden logo, by the way) isn't going to get you anywhere. Studying is. I know, I know, it sounds like something your parents would say.

Yell, "Stop!" No, I'm not kidding; yell You'll feel better. Get up from your desk and do something else—anything—for an hour. Don't think about the problem. After this break, you're going to study as hard as you can, so what is there to worry about? Besides, judging from those logos, if you fail bio, you can always go into commercial artwork. You'll return to your desk in control of the situation instead of it being in control of you.

Research on stress has shown that it's the petty, day-to-day annoyances that cause the most strain in our lives, the little things over which we have some control. Tackle those parts of your life you have the power to change, even if it's just something as superficial as wearing your hair a different way to make you feel better about yourself. (Interestingly enough, in one study on teenage tension, the top concern was weight, with physical appearance not far down the list.) The big things, such as parents' divorce or the death of a loved one (or a salesman), are often beyond our control.

I always try to put things in perspective. Not too long ago I was talking to a musician who plays in a marginally successful heavy metal band with two LPs to its credit. I was griping that the fourth Twisted Sister album, Come Out and Play, didn't do as well as Stay Hungry. It had sold "only" one and a half million copies around the world. My musician friend's eyes were wide with amazement—he couldn't conceive of selling a fraction of that amount, and here I was

complaining. Years ago, when Twisted Sister was playing bars for a living, I dreamed of selling even five hundred thousand albums—enough for a gold-album award. It made me realize that I had temporarily lost sight of reality. I've got a lot to be thankful for.

Want a strong dose of perspective? Turn on the evening news: an entire midwestern town destroyed by flooding; a family whose father was shot to death in a grocery-store holdup; a baby girl dying of an incurable disease. Suddenly your problems will seem small in comparison and won't loom quite as large as they did before.

I'm not saying your problems aren't real—they are. What I am saying is, reflect on the many good things in your life. They usually outweigh the bad, if only by a little. I'm always grateful for what I have, first starting very small. When I lie down in bed at night, there are a mattress under me, blankets on top of me, a roof over my head, food in my stomach—and my wife and son are safe and healthy. And so on. It's not always an easy thing to do, but try it, and pretty soon the enormity of those problems, pressures and stresses won't seem so overwhelming. Uh-oh, I'm starting to sound like a cosmic hippie here. Excuse me while I do the only honorable thing: off myself. I

You have to leave yourself open to feeling, which is something I've always had trouble with. I've never felt able to truly appreciate the moment. After years of wanting success and working so hard to achieve it, I still can't really grasp what it feels like. I can't really describe it. I'll go out in my big backyard in the country, which is where I always wanted to live. It's a beautiful day, and yet I'll have difficulty really feeling it. What I've realized is, you have to let it touch you, just let it happen to you.

The best things in life are often the little things—although, I must admit, there are times when I go diving into my nice big swimming pool that I think the big things ain't too bad either! But here's an example: One time, before Twisted Sister hit it big, I was driving around with my wife and my son on a cold, rainy day. The heater was going, the windshield wipers were slapping away and I was sipping a hot cup of coffee. We had no particular place to go, just driving around, doing some shopping, a few bucks in my pocket and a studio apartment—rent paid—to go back home to. I was genuinely happy, and it was all so simple, like being in a TV commercial.

For a long time I'd searched for something called Happiness, and it turned out to be nothing more than a warm car on a cold day. And the best part was, and is, you don't have to be rich and famous to achieve this happiness. Anybody can do it.

When you feel depressed

In my early teens I could have made a career out of being I depressed; maybe a "depression consultant," with my own firm at age fourteen. I spent so much of my time feeling down—over I my rocky relationship with my father; being rejected by the kids I at school; my unhappiness with the way I looked and acted; let's I see, is that everything?—I didn't recognize it as being a different I destructive state of mind. I just accepted it.

It is normal to experience mild depression from time to time, but in some people it can mushroom into a full-blown debilitating mental disorder. Depression is a reaction to a loss. It can be a tangible loss, such as the death of a pet, a friend moving out of town or the breakup of a romance. Or the loss can also be your sense of well-being or self-esteem—getting teased at school, feeling left out within your family following the arrival of a new baby, and so on. You can even feel depressed after a major achievement such as scoring the crucial touchdown in a football game, getting the highest grade on a test or winning a dance contest. The goal you worked for is now gone, and until you replace it with a new goal, you may feel a sense of emptiness. Some typical causes of teenage depression are:

- parents' marital problems
- death of a loved one or pet
- serious family illness
- overly strict or permissive parents. (Permissive parents being depressing? I wouldn't know from personal experience…)
- lack of friends. (This I know about…)
- feelings of failure. (And this…)
- enrollment in a new school. (How about enrollment in school, period?)

Depression is often contagious. It is estimated that as many as four of five persons living with a depressed person become bummed out themselves. When adults are depressed, they usually react appropriately: a sad face; crying; fatigue, yet difficulty sleeping; lost of appetite; feelings of isolation; guilt and low self-esteem.

However, blue teenagers often do not show those cues that can alert others. As I did, they mask their true emotions. Some behave self-destructively: drinking, drugging, becoming promiscuous, alienating themselves from others or hanging around with the wrong people. Unfortunately, their parents and other adults frequently respond only to the behavior without probing deeper to identify the underlying causes. Many parents are guilty of not hearing what's really being said. I think that much of the time they don't want to acknowledge their children's problems, because that might reflect badly on them as parents. Or they react to their teens' depression with anger, which only intensifies the sadness.

If you're feeling down, you need to talk to someone; ideally, your parents. I never was able to do that, and I rarely confided in my friends, fearing they would think I was weird. So I held in my sadness, which was not healthy. Think of a person you feel comfortable with—not necessarily an adult—and open up. If you're like I was, you'll probably worry that he or she will laugh at you. He or she might. But the odds are that you're not going to tell them anything they haven't felt themselves, so give it a shot. If you absolutely can't think of anyone to unload on, most communities have crisis-intervention hot lines, staffed by trained, concerned volunteers. Not only can they dispense valuable advice, they're good listeners. (This is also known as being put on hold. Just kidding.) Sometimes the fact that they are strangers, faceless—just warm, friendly voices at the other end of the telephone—makes people less reluctant to discuss their problems and feelings openly. You can find the phone number of your local hot line either by looking under "Crisis Intervention Service" in the Yellow Pages or by consulting the Community Services Numbers at the front of the White Pages. In addition, there is private counseling with a trained therapist, an alternative we'll discuss later in this chapter.

Though it's natural to feel totally alone and without hope when you are depressed, understand that help is always available.

Lift Weights, Lift Your Spirits (Lift My Heart in San Francisco)

Since I couldn't, or wouldn't, talk about my depressive feelings, I suppose I acted them out by escaping through music. Instead of letting my depression incapacitate me and turn me into a vegetable, I harnessed my anger and frustration, both of which are very physical emotions. Every day after school, I came home, locked my bedroom door, turned up my stereo and rocked out in front of my mirror, singing and playing all the instruments. I'd go at it for hours, and when I finished I was dripping wet with sweat, and the pressure I'd felt in my head and my chest seemed to lift. I could then deal with the causes of my depression—and with life in general—more rationally. "Performing" in front of the mirror also helped me to develop many of the stage moves I use today.

Exercise or any repetitious physical activity can help pick up low spirits, not only in the sense that it takes your mind off your problems, but physically. Vigorous exercise causes the brain to release natural opiates called endorphins, which are three times more powerful than the drug morphine. (Jeez, all this time I thought I was straight, and it turns out that I'm an endorphin addict! And I love it! Aha-ha-ha-ha!) Though it isn't proved, it has been theorized that exercise shuts down

the analytical side of the brain, freeing the more artistic, creative side. I don't know if weight lifting and running actually inspire me to write songs, but they definitely give me ideas: like, "Why am I writing this book?"

Seriously, exercising makes me feel better about myself, and when I feel better about myself, I'm a happy dude. Weight lifting seems to make thematic sense to me: play heavy metal, lift heavy metal. I even jog to heavy metal, listening through a pair of lightweight headphones. You have to be careful, though: One time I ran to Motorhead's No Sleep Till Hammersmith, and when the song "Ace of Spades' came on, it was so relentlessly fast and aggressive, I blasted out of the gate, up the road, back down the road and went flying past my house. I couldn't stop because those guys never heard of a ballad.

I find that taking a physical approach to getting myself out of a depression works. You don't solve problems by lying listlessly in your room and moping. Plus, the longer you remain depressed, the less dire a condition depression seems. You begin to get into it court it, treat it like your only friend. It becomes something you are comfortable with and understand. Instead, try throwing yourself into the action. Your boyfriend broke up with you and you're bummed? Forget him! Walk up to the local shopping mall and meet some new dudes. Believe me, guys are like buses: If you miss one, there will always be another stopping by in a few minutes. I know that sounds like something your mother would say sweetly, at which point you probably feel like hurling a hand grenade in her general direction. But it's true. Don't dwell on the problem; seek a solution. And by the way, don't try the hand-grenade bit. I did, and it only made my mom mad.

Depression is not only psychological. If you feel severely depressed and it doesn't lift after a few days, you may want to see a mental health professional, for your problem may be biochemical; that is, a chemical imbalance in the brain has triggered what is called endogenous depression, which has no apparent cause. In cases like these, antidepressant drugs are prescribed, and the patient may undergo drug therapy and psychotherapy. Other factors that contribute to depression are genetic and toxic—alcohol and drug use, for example, can generate depression.

The biggest depressions in my life have been over the things that mean the most to me: my band, my wife—probably my son in a few years, once he becomes a teenager. Even with the success Twisted Sister has had, I still get depressed at times, but the depression usually fades once the crisis lets up. Time heals all wounds is one of the oldest expressions in the world, and when you're in agony, it's the last thing you want to hear. But just give time a chance.

The suicide solution is no solution

Where suicide is concerned, I am one unsympathetic son of a bitch. When I was growing up I didn't have anything going for me; I don't think there are too many of you reading this book who could be any more pathetic than I was. Yet, as dreadful as my life seemed at times, I never contemplated suicide. I don't think anybody should kill himself. Oh, there were times when I indulged the fantasy, much as I'm sure you have when in deep despair. "I'll slow-cook myself in the crock pot" you grumble. "That'll teach Mom and Dad not to buy me a Ferrari." It's all just harmless melodrama, and you have no intention of literally carrying out your threat. Besides, you don't have a driver's license anyway.

I'm not going to say there aren't problems and disappointments so crushing that the thought of going to sleep for eternity seems comforting. Some troubles do seem unsolvable. Yet somehow people rise above them or learn to live with them. I believe there is an alternative to suicide: I call it mental suicide. If you're miserable with your existence, do something about it. Change the way you look. If possible, move to another town, another state, another country. Transform your identity. That's what I did when Daniel Snider became Dee Snider. Remember, you are capable of changing many things in your life.

Unfortunately, most suicidal men and women have an intense dislike of themselves. They feel worthless, helpless and incapable of summoning the strength and courage to drastically alter their life. I felt that way for some time, but I'm still here to tell you that it can be done.

A Cry for Help

Most people who attempt suicide do not want to die. They have lost the ability to communicate in normal ways, so they take an overdose of pills or slash their wrists as a way to let everyone know the intensity of their despondency. Some suicides die praying they will be discovered beforehand. The following figures are probably conservative, since not all suicides leave farewell notes and may get reported as accidental deaths, but approximately four hundred thousand teenagers attempt suicide every year, with fewer than two thousand succeeding. (That's about a .005 batting average; I'd say their technique needs some work.) According to the most recent figures from the National Center for Health Statistics, suicide is the third-leading came of death among people between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. More women than men attempt to kill themselves, yet

men succeed more often and are inclined to use violent means such as hanging or shooting, Then there are those whose suicide attempts fail, and end up paralyzed for lift or disabled.

One disturbing trend has been a rash of copycat suicides in communities around the world. One teen commits suicide, then a short time later another, then another. Now, what are these kids going to tell Saint Peter when they arrive up at the pearly gates and are asked why they killed themselves? "Everybody was doing it"? "I finally found a group I could fit in with"? What a waste!

If Someone You Know Seems Suicidal

In one survey of teens, fewer than half the boys said they would tell an adult if a friend wanted to commit suicide. For girls the figure was somewhat higher. I say that your first responsibility is to save the person's life even at the possible expense of your friendship. After all, if he or she kills themselves, you won't have a friend to lose. It is important that you trust your instincts, and if a friend's behavior has you concerned, act on your feelings. Better to be wrong than to be proved right when it's too late.

Signs of suicidal behavior include:

- suicidal talk, such as "I'd rather kill myself"
- suicidal fantasies voiced aloud
- expressing feelings of worthlessness: "No one would miss me anyway"
- preoccupation with death in music, art or literature
- giving away cherished possessions

If a friend seems to be dropping hints, confront him. Talk to him, listen to him. Make him feel important and wanted, and reassure him that wounds do heal with time—except for bullet holes in the head. If you feel there is imminent danger, stay with the person until the behavior subsides. Urge him to seek professional help. Tell an adult whom you trust, who will arrange for the person to receive help. But most of all, show that you care.

You may notice that after hinting at killing himself, the person suddenly seems like his old self again. Aha, the old false-recovery trick. This doesn't necessarily mean the crisis has passed, for the thought of suicide brings comfort to those who are distraught. They feel in control of their lives again and that soon their problems will all be over. One study done on suicide showed that 75 percent of them had been to see a doctor one month or less before killing themselves, and the warning signs were not noticed or given enough attention.

Something else to be aware of: Just because a person has already attempted unsuccessfully to take his life doesn't mean he won't try

again, it is said that the first attempt, crossing that line between thinking about suicide and actually doing it, is the most difficult.

If you're thinking seriously about suicide, I urge you to talk to somebody who can help. There are between five hundred and six hundred suicide-prevention centers in the country staffed by trained counselors who will listen to you and recommend solutions. If you feel nobody cares about you, call, because they do. Refer to the Community Services Numbers at the beginning of the White Pages and look under "Suicide Prevention" or under "Youth Board" in the County Government Offices listings for the phone number of the crisis center in your area.

If someone you know has taken an overdose of pills, dial the police emergency and Poison Control numbers, which also can be found in the White Pages Community Services Numbers.

Running away from home

Running away from home to escape a problem is not the answer unless you have somewhere to run to. Maybe you've thought of running away to the nearest big city, where you'll tough it out on the streets. Sounds romantic, doesn't it? Every year, 150,000 runaways with the very same idea do that. Then they disappear, never to be heard from again.

Life on the streets is no life. Of the 1.5 million adolescent boys and girls who run away each year, most return home within a few days. But those who linger on the streets for a month or more usually turn to prostitution as a way of earning a living. They often suffer from malnutrition, disease and drug abuse.

That's not the picture I had in mind whenever things got real bad at home and I considered running away. A friend and I talked on occasion about fleeing our tyrannical parents. The grand scheme was that we would sneak into a department store at night, gather as much camping equipment as we could carry, smuggle it out and somehow make our way to California, where we would live on the beach. It was overly romanticized and utterly ridiculous, and I'm sure glad we never did it.

Whatever most of your problems are at home, there are better solutions than running away, which does nothing except to substitute one miserable environment for another. If you are a victim of parental abuse (like one third of all runaways), by telling the proper authorities you can find shelter in an emergency placement center. And if the problem with your parents can't be solved, adoptive-home or foster-home care will be arranged. We outline who to contact, how to contact them and what to say in chapter 9 and in the Help Yourself

chapter at the end of this book. Yes, in these situations you must get out of the house, but make sure you have someplace to go.

If you're miserable at your school, discuss with your parents the possibility of transferring to another school. Trouble at home? Maybe arrangements can be made for you to stay with a relative temporarily. The point is, to run away is to run to nowhere, and the severity of the problems at home are small alongside those you will face out on the streets: alone, broke, hungry and vulnerable to muggers, pimps—who enslave youngsters into prostitution—and murderers.

If you have run away, were abandoned or thrown out of your home, call one of these three national runaway hotlines: Home Run, 800-647-7968; Runaway Hotline, 800-231-6946; or National Runaway Switchboard, 800-621-4000. They can help provide temporary shelter, call your parents for you to leave messages and even arrange for transportation home.

Counseling

If I'd had the money when I was a kid wrestling with problems and trying to sort out my feelings, I definitely would have gone for counseling. To have the opportunity to talk about myself and be the center of attention? Are you kidding? I'd have paid good money.

Before we continue, this important announcement: seeking professional help does not mean you are crazy. It is not a form of punishment and nothing to be ashamed of. These days, in fact It's kind of cool. Find me a Hollywood actor or actress who doesn't practically pledge undying gratitude to his or her analyst from the podium when accepting an Oscar award. Sylvester Stallone? Okay, that's one. Charles Bronson? Hey, shut up, wiseass!

You cannot always talk to your friends about what's troubling you, for a lot of reasons. Either you're too inhibited to completely let down your guard, or they don't have the answers either. Maybe your friends are even part of your problem. Parents can be equally hard to discuss serious problems with. It sometimes seems like they're just plain disinterested.

"Hi, dear, how was your day at school?"

What most parents would like to hear, of course, is:

"Great day, Ma! In English we studied Shakespeare, and I can't wait to draw out these Venn diagrams!"

"Oh, that's nice."

And that would be the end. A simply wonderful parent-child exchange. We all know, though, that life's not so simple, unless your family is the Brady Bunch. What if the teenager comes home, is asked how his day was and he replies, "Horrible. I asked out Susie Evans,

and she laughed in my face and said no way because I'm a nerd. I was totally humiliated. Ma, I'm really having problems dealing with my unattractiveness and sexuality. What do you think?"

Meanwhile, Ma is out cold, having fainted somewhere between "problems" and "sexuality" into the artichoke salad she was preparing in the kitchen.

In such cases, when you feel uncomfortable talking to friends or family, or if a problem seems so complex that you need a professional's help, I recommend counseling. But then, I'm just an unattractive nerd who has problems dealing with his sexuality, so what do I know?

Who Does Counseling?

Psychiatrists; psychologists; marriage-family-child therapists or counselors; psychiatric social workers; and psychiatric nurses. Each has a different kind of education and experience. A psychiatrist, for example, must earn a doctor of medicine, or M.D., degree and have treated mental and emotional illnesses in training beyond medical school Only a psychiatrist can prescribe drugs to a patient. A family-marriage-child therapist, or counselor, is required to have a master's degree in marriage-family-child counseling and three thousand hours of supervised clinical experience and must pass a state licensing test.

Therapy sessions may be held individually, with just you and a therapist; with family members present, trying to solve the family's problems as a whole; and in groups, with between five and eight unrelated persons, all exchanging feelings and learning from one another's experiences. Counseling may last several weeks, months or years, depending on the nature of the problem and on whether you feel the counseling is succeeding in helping make you a healthier, happier person.

What can you learn in counseling? About yourself, about your family, and you may be able to talk in ways you never could to those around you. Sometimes it takes that outside, objective observer to help us get to the truth about things.

How Do You Locate a Competent Counselor?

In the Help Yourself chapter, at the end of this book, we've listed the names, addresses and phone numbers of four organizations (American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy and Family Service America) that can help you find a therapist who suits your needs and your family's budget. Remember, however, that if

you begin therapy and find that you are not comfortable with the counselor or do not feel you're making progress, tell your parents that you'd like to try somebody else. This does not mean the counselor is incompetent, simply that he or she is not the right person for you. Keep looking until you're satisfied.

The only reason I didn't go for counseling when I was young was my fear at asking my parents. There's no reason to be embarrassed or scared to acknowledge that you need help. Until you admit it and take some steps to correct the problem, it remains a problem, and sometimes it even gets worse.

What do you want to do with your life?

They say: "When will you go to school? Why doncha get a job? You'd better shape up, You're lookin' like a slob. You think that life's a free ride? Well, take a tip from me. We're gonna end your party With some responsibility."

—"I'll never grow up, now," Twisted Sister

11. Career and College

Deciding on your career can be one of the hardest choices you'll ever have to make. Confusing, too. I remember once taking an aptitude test, which supposedly tells your guidance counselor what you'd be good at. According to the results, I had what it took to be either (a) a sanitation worker, (b) an ambassador or (c) both. I guess the indicators were that (a) my room and car were always overflowing with trash and (b) I love Italian food. Big help that was.

Actually, I didn't need an aptitude test. I knew what I was going to do with my life from the time I was eight years old, after seeing the Beatles perform on "The Ed Sullivan Show." The audience screamed hysterically for the group, and I thought to myself, "This is for me." If I ever had any doubts about becoming a performer, they were erased later that year when I sang a solo in the glee club's Christmas pageant. There I was in front of a packed auditorium of beaming parents, with the spotlight on me. When I finished, the stage lights came on, and everybody cheered. No costumes, long hair, makeup or dry-ice smoke, but it made a lasting impression.

To me being a rock & roll singer was a dream job. Consider the qualifications: *Help Wanted—Male Rock Vocalist. Should be able to withstand rapturous applause and adoration. Long hours in the spotlight. High tolerance for mass-media attention a must. Salary unlimited.* Yeah, I figured I could drag myself out of bed in the morning—sorry, late afternoon-—for a job like that.

My craving for attention was so intense, not only did I have to be in a band, I had to be the leader, like the Beatles' John Lennon. Better yet, the lead singer, like Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones. As long as singing in a group remained a hobby, my parents didn't try to dampen my enthusiasm. It was deemed "cute." But the older I got, the "uglier" it got, and the more they felt it was distracting me from my studies. On weeknights they'd forbid me to leave the house to rehearse. However, I was allowed to leave the house to jog, so I'd jog right on down to the rehearsal hall, sing with the band and jog right back.

Even before I planned to make a career of music, my parents discouraged me, especially my father. For example: When I was about thirteen, my sister and I decided to form a band—sort of the singing Sniders. I sang and played guitar, which I had just learned, while Susan banged a tambourine and sang backup. One of the biggest tunes on the radio was "Nobody But Me" by a group called the Human Beinz. You may know it by way of George Thorogood, who recorded it and shot a video for it a few years ago. It's really simple to play on guitar, and only a moron couldn't memorize the lyrics:

No-no no no-no no no-no-no No no-no no-no no no-no No-no no no no-no-no no no No-no no no-no no-no.

Yeah, it's a d-u-m-b song. But we practiced it all day until it sounded pretty good, and we were bursting with pride. We couldn't wait to play it for our dad.

My father arrived home from work, and we were all over him in a second. "Hey, Dad, we learned this song; can we play it for you?" We were really excited.

"All right, all right! Just let me get my shoes off!" Then: "Okay, let's hear it."

"No-no no no-no ..."

Upon our finishing, this was Dad's reaction:

"What the hell is that? 'No-no no no-no no'?! You call that a song? Marge, did you hear this stupid song? 'No-no no no-no ....'"

My sister and I were crushed. And for years afterward, whenever we had guests over and they asked little Danny what he wanted to do for a living, and I—being a glutton for punishment—answered, "Be a rook star," my father would launch into, "Oh* yeah? A rock & roll star? Let me tell you about this song he played for me, 'No no-no no , . .' " And everybody would howl with laughter.

I don't think that parents should discourage kids from any interest, no matter how foolish or impractical it might seem at the time. It's through trying different things that a person finds his or her true course in life. Some experiences may seem to be off that path, but eventually you discover what's right for you. It may take some time, too. Prevent a person from becoming a fashion designer, a stock-car driver, a circus clown, anything, and he's never going to stop wanting that until he has the opportunity to try it.

I say to parents, whatever your teenager is into—sports, music, joining the debate team—let him or her go for it. You should be glad to see your kid be enthusiastic about anything. For instance, I was always very sloppy—still am, actually; you should see the room I'm writing this in! When I was nineteen, I bought a Ford Mustang Mach I. It wasn't new, but it was the first car I'd ever owned that was in good condition.

I was so excited about this car that I washed it every day. I didn't even wash myself every day. It was the first time I'd ever shown any initiative when it came to taking pride in the appearance of anything. After the fifth straight day of washing this car, my father let me have it, yelling at me that nobody washes his car every day—which was true—that it was stupid, and that it was a waste of water (you know, gang, those heavy water bills: $32 every six months).

So I stopped washing my car for good, and it became like every car I'd ever had—piled high to the roof with hamburger wrappers,

gum and old soda cans, and with a half-inch of grime concealing the entire paint job.

Eventually my enthusiasm would have leveled off. Nobody washes his car every day for the rest of his life. It would have dropped to three times a week, then once a week and so on. At least I was showing some enthusiasm, pride and responsibility, even if it was directed only at a car. The same went for the band. It wasn't just a recreational activity, it was educational, teaching me about being on time, being accountable for my actions and functioning as part of a group.

My parents didn't quite see it that way, and as high school graduation approached, I began hearing The Question: "So, what do you want to do with your life?" I always had the answer ready, but to them it just wasn't realistic. They were absolutely correct: The music business's failures far outweigh its success stories. But I was determined to give it my all anyway.

Now, if they really wanted to discourage me, they should have tried rooting me on. That would have weaned me off rock & roll good and fast! My advice to any parent who doesn't want his kid to be a musician: support it. "You want to be a rock & roll star, dear? Okay!" Buy him or her thousands of dollars' worth of equipment, a van, insist on chauffeuring him to every performance, become the group's road manager, and that kid will be an accountant for life quicker than you can say "I Wanna Rock."

It wasn't only my parents who felt I was headed for heartbreak. Except for my wife, Suzette, and some musician friends who understood, would you believe that only one friend of mine never tried to stop me? Family members, relatives, neighbors, friends, Whenever the band's luck sagged, there was always someone urging me to quit. "Maybe it's time to move on," they'd say. "How much longer are you going to give it?" You can't allow others to discourage you. Many of the people who told me to give up the band had my best interests at heart, I'm sure, but they had surrendered their own dreams too quickly. You may notice this now—in junior high or high school—that some people are uncomfortable around those with ambition or who go against the flow.

When I was twenty, I busted my butt on a loading dock at a department store and made the mistake of telling my co-workers that I was going to be a rock star. It was one of the funniest things they'd ever heard, and they never let me live it down. "Hey, Mister Rock & Roll Star!" It became my nickname: "Rock Star." Come to think of it, I guess it was pretty funny watching a "rock star" clean garbage cans. They resented me and the fact that I believed in a dream—even when things seemed their bleakest.

Once, I had just quit a local group called Peacock, was several grand in debt, hungry, and had to move back home with my parents and take a job in a record warehouse. I had nothing going for me at the time: no money, no car, no girlfriend. But I never once believed I was at the end of the line, despite what those around me said. Otherwise I could have kissed it all goodbye; that would have been it right there.

What if Twisted Sister had never achieved success? Would I be kicking myself for spending ten years trying to swim upstream? Would it have been a waste of time? Absolutely, positively not! I'd be disappointed but satisfied, knowing that I gave the group my best effort and would have had no regrets. That's the most important thing, to never allow yourself to be in the position of saying, "I should have" or "If only I had…“ I've never said, "I should have," I've always said, "I did." Or at least, "I tried." If you have a goal, go after it, especially while you're young, without the responsibilities of a home and family. That's not to say you can't make career changes later in life—you can, if you sincerely believe you can—but certainly your life is a lot more flexible early on. Don't get scared off by the prospect of failure. Don't even think about it. Dee-fucious say: The only failure is the failure to act.

Of course, be realistic about your capabilities and your limitations. Sometimes those limitations are physical: A six-foot-tall girl who weighs 200 pounds is going to have a difficult time becoming a ballerina, just as a five-foot-tall, 120-pound boy is not likely to become a football hero. Then there are intellectual limitations. I consider myself to be a pretty bright person, but becoming a nuclear physicist is probably beyond my reach, besides not suiting my style. As far as I know, no research laboratories allow audiences.

It's a fine line. You don't want to deceive yourself, but at the same time you don't want to sell yourself short and give up too easily. Maybe you're destined to become the first six-foot-tall, 200-pound ballerina, or the first five-foot-tall, 120-pound football hero. Who knows, maybe one day I'll become the first nuclear physicist with a platinum album.

In the same way that people often get stereotyped—he's not artistic; she's not graceful—and respond accordingly, even adults sometimes give in to prejudgments. These stereotypes may be based on race, nationality, sex, age, size, looks, anything. A man is not supposed to be able to cook, yet the majority of master chefs are men; an athlete is not supposed to excel at mental or creative endeavors.

I face it all the time. Being a rock & roller, I'm not supposed to be good at physical work or using my hands. For example, once I wanted to build a hutch for my son's pet rabbit. Everyone advised against it,

even my wife. She said the perfect thing, too, to motivate me: "Are you sure you want to do that? You're not really good with this stuff…"

That did it. I bought a how-to book, some wood and the necessary tools, and let me tell you, I constructed an awesome rabbit hutch capable of withstanding a nuclear attack. My family's and friends' reactions were: "You built this?"

I convinced myself that anybody could build a rabbit hutch, just as I'm sure there are carpenters who watch me perform in one of Twisted Sister's videos and think, "Hey, I could do that, prance around in a pair of tights and makeup and curse at the audience. No problem." There will always be people to say you can't. Ignore them. Don't allow limitations to be imposed on you by others. I believe that most people are capable of lots of skills: writing a song, building something with their hands, anything. You just have to be willing to commit yourself to the job and work at it.

The next time someone tries to talk you out of doing something you want to do—joining the girls' hockey team "because you're not athletic," studying singing "because you can't carry a tune in a bucket"—take it as a personal insult, and let it serve as the inspiration to do it. Barriers are made to be broken, and obstacles are for eluding.

A Series of Sieves

Think of your career search as a series of sieves. I'm going to use aspiring to be a rock star as an example because it's a symbol of an extraordinary goal, but the same goes for wanting a career in medicine, law, special education—anything and everything.

The first sieve's holes are large: Do you play a musical instrument or sing, or are you willing to learn and practice? A number of people slip through, while others admit to themselves that they don't have either the talent or the dedication.

The next sieve is somewhat finer: Are you willing to practice every weekend with the group? "Every weekend? No, I'm not willing to sacrifice my weekends," many realize, and so they drop out. Those who are willing slip through. This goes on and on, the sieves getting finer and finer. Either you reach your original goal, or you discover your niche along the way. Maybe you wanted to be in the space program, a field even more competitive than the entertainment industry. Though you may never sit in a rocket to carry you into space, you may find it interesting to be the person who operates the flight simulator that astronauts use in training. However, you never would have discovered that job if you hadn't gone after your dream.

Related Careers

My parents and my then-girlfriend were all dedicated to the cause of making me a better person (in other words, normal), and so they pressured me constantly to switch careers if music didn't work, A safety net, they called it. "Of course you're going to become a rock & roll star," they'd assure me, a bit patronizingly, "but just in case..." I eventually caved in.

I figured that if I couldn't earn a living recording and singing on records, the next best thing would be to spin them on the radio as a disc jockey. But halfway through my freshman year in college, I realized that the career I truly wanted required an intensive effort and that my attention and energies could not be divided between two objectives. I made the decision to drop the safety net and force myself to succeed: With no net under me, a fall was really going to hurt.

I don't necessarily recommend that game plan to everyone. It suited me because I'm an intense person who likes to immerse himself totally in his work. Yet as determined as I was, I always knew of the options. I ignored them, but I knew of them. Not every person interested in a music career becomes a musician, or even wants to become one. Maybe they don't have the talent or the ambition, or their gifts lie in other areas such as the ability to guide an artist in the recording of an album: a producer. Another person's skill might be as an engineer, being responsible for transferring the artist's performance to recording tape,

Another person specializes in preparing the master disk. Someone else designs the album jacket. Then you have armies of people who work in the business end of the industry: discovering and signing talent (Artists and Repertory, or A & R), promoting the artist to radio stations and the media (promotion and publicity). There are musicians who go on to teach, become studio musicians, write and sing commercial jingles. If I weren't a rock & roller, maybe I'd be doing one of these jobs, though I doubt it'd be singing radio and TV spots. With my voice, I'd scare potential customers away. I can hear it now: "*whadaya wanna have with your burger!*"

There are many careers. What comes to mind when you think of a mechanic? Grease, dirt and oil; trying to resurrect someone's road-weary station wagon. Not always. The mechanic who services my cars works only on exotic sports cars. You should see his shop: two bays, spotlessly clean, with hanging plants and skylights, a stereo system with quad speakers and a compact disc player. He makes more money than most mechanics and works in a much more pleasant environment, essentially doing the exact same job.

Look at the end credits of a motion picture. It's not just actors, actresses and directors who are responsible for the film. There are camera operators, producers, sound people, stuntmen and women, key

grips, special effects specialists, even caterers to serve the crew and cast while on location.

Did you know that all arena rock acts, including Twisted Sister, require the services of an electrician while on tour? And a carpenter, to work on the stage set? And drivers, to steer the trucks and tour buses? The list goes on and on. These people are applying their skills in unconventional and exciting ways. You don't have to settle for a boring job. If a particular field or trade interests you, start researching and learn as much as you can about it. You'll be surprised to discover the many interesting career possibilities.

How Do You Learn About These Jobs?

Don't depend only on school guidance counselors, but do your own looking into the job market. Go to your school or public library, and in the Subject card file look up the categories "Careers," "Vocational Guidance," "Employment," "Occupations" and "Professions." You'll find a ton of books on various industries and on specific careers—anything from attorney to fisherman to actress to sheet-metal worker—detailing the required education or apprenticeships, the salary range, future prospects for the industry and other information.

That approach isn't for me; I'm more of a hands-on kind of guy. Sometimes you have to enter a field of study, or even the field itself, to learn where your specialty lies. A friend of mine went to school to study medicine, switched to dentistry and eventually wound up as a podiatrist, or foot doctor. Getting a job with a construction company may not appeal to you at the time, but as you become familiar with the business, you'll learn about related careers. You don't have to build houses. Instead you can build custom furniture or Hollywood movie sets.

If You Have No Direction

The career-guidance system has supposedly made great strides since the time I was in high school. I hope so. Back then, you met with your counselor, and career opportunities ran the gamut from A to B. "Well, Daniel, there's medicine, law, civil service and carpentry."

"That's it?!"

"Oh, yes, and sanitation work and foreign diplomacy."

I imagine if you came home from school and announced to your parents, "Hey, guess what! My guidance counselor told me I should be a poet!" "An existential philosopher!" If I had told my parents, "My guidance counselor says I should pursue a career in rock & roll," that

counselor would have soon been seeking new employment himself.

According to the career-guidance counselors we spoke with, computer technology has revolutionized the career-counseling industry. If you don't know what direction to go in, counseling might be a valuable resource. Maybe it won't lead you to the exact address, but it might assist you in at least locating the street. You can find these counseling centers by looking under the heading "Career and Vocational Counseling' in the Yellow Pages phone book. Through interviews and a bunch of tests, the professionals at these centers link your interests, abilities and personality with appropriate careers, selecting from several hundred.

The average cost of such a program, which generally involves several visits, is $250. If you feel this would be helpful, discuss it with your parents. Some career-counseling centers have career-information libraries, stocked with up-to-date occupational books and pamphlets as well as college and professional-school bulletins. The material covers the important parts of a wide range of careers and offers info pertaining to salaries, requirements, duties performed and future prospects. One book that several career counselors recommended was the Occupational Outlook Handbook, which is issued each year by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Many but not all libraries carry it, or you can order it for $23 hardcover and $20 paperback from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402. Within this one source you will find out about a number of careers.

Besides exploring careers, you should also examine yourself. No, not down there! Ask any small child what he or she wants to be when they grow up, and the reply is predictably, "President" "A baseball player." "A famous actress." "Dee Snider." In theory, everybody wants to be the big chief, the boss, the main dude. In reality, only a few have the drive, the ability and, sometimes even more important, the willingness to endure the pressures and to make the sacrifices. Questions to ask yourself include:

- What are your priorities? Power? Prestige?
- Do you find fulfillment in helping others?
- Do you enjoy working as part of a team or on your own?
- Which is more important to you, money or self-satisfaction?
- Do you have the type of temperament conducive to making decisions and directing others?

Money should not be the only factor in selecting a vocation. Ideally your career should be one in which you can express yourself and use your talents. That was an unheard-of idea not too long ago. It was generally accepted that a person rarely enjoyed his work, much less found self-fulfillment through it. The only reward was the weekly

paycheck. But during the 1960s, a time of great social and cultural change, people began to look for jobs that they considered meaningful.

It's important that you enjoy your work. Hating your job doesn't just affect you between the hours of nine and five, it affects you twenty-four hours a day. I saw this with my father. When he was working as a police officer and an insurance salesman—both jobs with a great deal of pressure—he was a nightmare to live with. But when he was in his mid-forties, he became a court officer. He still got to wear a uniform and carry a gun, but he didn't have to watch bloodied victims of car accidents being placed on stretchers, deal with hardened criminals or sell old ladies on overpriced insurance policies. And what a difference it made in his disposition.

If you spend your time watching the clock, waiting for the workday to end, you're really just watching your life tick slowly by. Sounds a lot like school, doesn't it?|

Our society has become more and more competitive and success has become almost too important. Teenagers are pressured to decide their life's direction as early as possible, which may be unhealthy and futile. For one thing, your interests may change between the time you enter high school and the time you start college. Plus, all the research in the world is no substitute for actually working. There are people who earn a degree in one area, only to discover they want to do something else. Sometimes it's in a completely different line of work and requires more education. There is a growing trend for adults in their thirties and forties to make radical career switches. Some are forced to be retrained because technology makes their skills obsolete.

Famous television newscaster and interviewer Barbara Walters, in addressing a university commencement in 1986, told the graduates that when she got out of college, she "hadn't a clue" as to what she wanted to do with her life. And, she went on. "You don't have to know now. You probably shouldn't know now." Thanks, Barbara. I couldn't have said it better myself,

However, I believe that it is good to have a goal, a target to aim for. It reduces pressure, I know It did in my case, Just knowing where I wanted to go, while many of my friends were wracking their brains trying to figure out what they wanted to do with their lives, Having a goal helps you to focus your energy – just realize that no decision is ever absolute and that you can make changes in your life at any time. In the immortal words of my younger brother Frank: "Just because I say I'm going to do something doesn't mean that I'm going to do it." Brilliant!

Setting Time Limits

Anything you truly want requires an investment. You'll have to invest more time than money. You can set timetables for yourself—"If I don't make it as a writer within five years, I'll return to school and get a teaching degree"—but you'll only wind up breaking them.

I joined Twisted Sister at age twenty-one. My father asked skeptically (for the hundredth time) how long I planned to give the band before I either returned to college or landed a "real" job. I mulled this over for a minute and replied, "Four years." Why I picked that figure, I have no idea, but it was an amount of time I could live with. It certainly seemed like a lot of years. I figured that by the time I hit twenty-five, I'd have it made.

But my twenty-fifth birthday came and went, and I was as doggedly determined as I had been four years earlier, even though the group's success was not yet at the level we had all hoped for. My father asked sarcastically, "What happened? You said four years." But four years was not enough time. Had Twisted Sister merely been treading water, maybe I would have traded in my stage outfit for a pinstripe suit. Maybe I would have joined another group. But every year we made steady progress, earning more money, acquiring more fans, building a reputation. Four years? It went by in a flash.

Now, if I had been told when I began as Twisted's singer, "Dee, you will become rich and famous, but first you're going to have to spend the next eight years of your life working twelve-hour days, five days a week," I probably would have said, "Thanks, but no thanks; I'll try something else." Eight years? That would have seemed an eternity.

As long as you're making progress and not kidding yourself about your abilities, don't be afraid to commit time to your goal. It's like running a marathon. Once you make it to the finish line, the tedious trip doesn't seem so bad anymore. And the end result is, you made it. It doesn't matter if you're twenty-one, twenty-five or twenty-nine, as I was when Twisted finally hit it big. Maybe success was even sweeter for me because of the time and effort involved, I'll tell you something else: You never feel as old at a given age as you thought you would. When you're fifteen, eighteen seems so old to you, but when you hit eighteen, you look in the mirror and, hmmm, you don't seem that much older after all. Thirty? Dude, that's ancient!

But it's not. Many people don't reach success until they're in their thirties, forties or fifties. For them there is always a goal to strive for, and they don't let age or time stand in their way. Neither should you.

Seize the Opportunity

With the cost of housing so high, more and more young people are choosing to live at home longer, either while going to college or

while working. During this time, before you have the responsibilities of a family, and with the reduced expenses of living at home, use it to your advantage, for you can get a great head start.

Two enterprising friends of mine found a used mower and began cutting lawns when they were just twelve years old. With the money they earned, they each bought a brand-new lawnmower. Eventually lawn mowing turned into a landscaping business, and the business grew and grew. Because they were still living at home, their expenses and overhead were minimal, and so they were able to reinvest their substantial profits back into their little business.

By the time the brothers were seventeen, it wasn't a little business anymore, with two big trucks to transport their mass of equipment and thirteen full-time adult employees—all while still operating out of their mother's garage. Some of the fruits of their labors were the two new cars they drove to school, one of which was a very expensive Italian sports car. Needless to say, the brothers didn't lack for dates. At eighteen they bought a nursery, sold the business at nineteen for a half-million dollars, and bought a larger nursery and developed it into a multimillion-dollar business by the time they were twenty-two. Not bad for two fatherless boys whose mother had been living on social security.

View this period of your life as an exciting opportunity, and don't be reluctant to take some gambles. I believe in risk taking, in not playing it safe, because, after all, what in this world is truly safe? The men who worked with me at the loading dock, who busted my chops because I didn't want to play it safe? How secure were they? They all lost their jobs when the department store—a major chain—went out of business a few years later. Don't get me wrong. It doesn't mean that you're a failure if you don't aspire to a six-figure high-profile job. Not everyone has the tenacity or is willing to endure the sacrifices required. For example, with me, for each benefit of stardom there is a trade off. Because of my celebrity and, for better or for worse, recognizable face, it's difficult for me to enjoy the simple pleasures that most of you take for granted: going to an amusement park, shopping in a mall, taking my son to the park to fly a kite. No matter how I disguise myself, pretty soon I'm surrounded by autograph and curiosity seekers, and my ability to live a normal life is ruined. For some, that is too high a price to pay.

Not everybody cares about a job title. For some, the greatest contribution to society is to be a good spouse and parent, to be a good and caring friend. There's no shame in not wanting to be the chief executive officer of a Fortune 500 corporation, and there are some people who would be proud not to be. You are not just your job title. There are sixteen hours a day that you're not working in which to

pursue other interests and to express yourself anyway you please.

Now, having just said that, I do believe that many people tend to sell themselves short. If you push yourself a little bit, you may be blown away by what you can accomplish. I'm a firm believer in never allowing yourself to get too comfortable. Long before Twisted Sister was signed to a record contract the band earned good money playing the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut club circuit. But we always paid ourselves a salary well below our actual earnings. Why? Because we'd seen competing bands become satisfied with their mid-level success, get complacent and stop struggling for the top. We swore to ourselves that we'd never let that happen to us; we'd keep the fire down below stoked and burning. I'll tell you, it wasn't always easy to do. Many of our friends on the scene gave up. I'm thankful to be able to say that our ambition and faith kept us going. In 1983 we were signed to Atlantic Records and released our second LP, *You Can't Stop Rock N' Roll*, our first for a major label. It didn't sell overwhelmingly in the United States but did quite well overseas, and in England we charted two hit singles. So, our record company informed us that for *Stay Hungry* it would back us 100 percent. It was "put up or shut up" time for Twisted Sister. If the LP failed, there would be no excuses.

As it turned out, we put up. *Stay Hungry* sold over two million copies in America alone, and after eight years our dream had finally come true—more than twenty years after I'd watched the Beatles perform on television, awestruck. I know that Twisted never would have succeeded if we hadn't taken chances.

Stay hungry; it's pretty good advice. Hey, anybody got a sandwich?

Colleges (and institutions of higher learning)

Not everyone is college material, a perfect example is my youngest brother, Doug. After graduating from high school, he waited until the end of summer before deciding whether to continue his education.

The last week of August, my father asked him, "Well, what are you going to do with your life? [I think there's a pattern forming here.] It's nearly September, and school starts next week. There are still a few smaller colleges or community colleges you could get into, but you have to make up your mind. Now, are you going to college or what?"

So my brother gave in. "All right," he said, "if you want me to go to school, I'll go to school."!

"Fine. But what are you going to major in?"

My brother thought this over for a minute and replied

impatiently, "Martial arts!"

"Martial arts?" asked my father, a bit perplexed. "You're going to major in judo and karate?"

"Naw, you know, martial arts, that general stuff."

"Do you mean liberal arts?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's it!" i

My father said right then and there that if my brother couldn't even properly identify what he wanted to study in college, he certainly wasn't going to pay for it.

My own college career was not too illustrious either. Mostly to satisfy my parents and my then girlfriend, I attended a local college—the New York Institute of Technology—as a communications major, taking courses in radio and television production.

I think I chose it because of its initials—N.I.T.—which was great in conversation for impressing others:

"What college do you go to?" "Oh [mumble], N.I.T." "Wow, M.I.T.? Massachusetts Institute of Technology? That's one of the most prestigious schools in the country!" "Uh, no. N.I.T." "N.I.T.? What's that?"

I never really gave myself a chance to learn if I was college material or not, because I dropped out after one year to pursue rock & roll full-time.

If you have no intention of applying yourself in college, you'd probably be better off entering the job market after high school. Unless, of course, you want to stall that and have time to party. But check out these figures on college tuitions: According to the United States Department of Education, Center for Statistics, for the 1985-86 school year the average yearly cost (including tuition, fees, room and board) of a four-year private university was $11,110, and $4,160 for a public university; for a four-year private college, $8,480, and for a four-year public college, $3,750; for a two-year private college, $6,410, and for a two-year public college, $3,000. Those costs get higher each year.

The facts are: college-educated men and women earn an average of $10,420 more per year than high school graduates do. Those with five years or more of college earn an average of $18,452 more than high school grads. Of course a college diploma is no certification of intelligence or the ability to perform a job, and maybe someday when you're in a position to hire personnel, you'll look more closely at their abilities than at their sheepskin, but today the college diploma has almost become what a high school diploma used to be: an expected standard.

However, there are plenty of students going to college who are going nowhere. Just because you enroll doesn't mean that you'll become a wealthy business tycoon, a prominent Wall Street attorney

or a noted child psychologist. As a matter of fact, a college diploma doesn't even come with a money-back guarantee promising you a job in your field of study.

How do you know if a college career is right for your future? Wall D's and F's in high school are usually pretty fair indicators that it isn't, in which case you'd better mosey on down to auto shop. (Just kidding!) As with finding a career direction, you have to outline your goals, thinking about your strengths and weaknesses, and decide which direction you want to go in.

Selecting the Proper College (What Kind of Recreational Facilities Do They Have, Dude?)

It's important that you look into all prospective colleges, and again, the school or public library can be helpful. Look under "College" and "Education" in the Subject card file. Particularly helpful are the encyclopedias and handbooks that tell the locations of the colleges; academic requirements, such as SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores; academic distribution requirements (ADRs—the number of required courses per major); and miscellaneous information that may be helpful to you in narrowing your choices (such as recreational facilities and the male/female ratio). |:

Another possibility is to attend one of the NACAC (National Association of College Admissions Counselors) National College Fairs, where reps from three hundred colleges and universities distribute literature and answer questions about programs and financial aid in one-on-one counseling sessions with you and your parents. They are held about eighteen times per academic year, in most major cities, for one or two days. Admission is free to students, parents and others who attend. To find out the date and location of the College Fair nearest to you, ask your guidance counselor or write: National College Fairs, NACAC, 9933 Lawler Avenue, Suite 500, Skokie, 111. 60077.

Like most other important decisions in life, you must honestly appraise yourself, your goals and your abilities. You don't want to enter a school where the work load is going to be so heavy that you can't participate in extracurricular activities and truly learn (in that order). College is not just for classroom studies; it's to educate you in life and to help you mature. To me that's even more important than your academic education. Factors to consider include college size, academic level, cost, location and environment (and male/female ratio!).

The benefits of a larger school, generally, are more varied classes, a larger faculty, more and better facilities, such as athletic programs, and more extracurricular activities. (Extremely important. But what

about the male/female ratio?) The drawbacks are a more impersonal atmosphere and less individual attention from the faculty and the administration. If those aspects are important to you, you might be better off at a smaller school.

If you're still searching for an area of study you might want to take the smorgasbord approach at a two-year community college, where you can obtain either an Associate of Arts (AA) or Associate of Science (AS) degree. Community colleges are relatively inexpensive—that is, inexpensive for your relatives, who are paying—and for those who are unsure of their direction, they are an excellent and affordable alternative. However, if you decide to transfer to a four-year school, you may have some difficulty getting all your community-college credits accepted. You knew there had to be a catch, right?

Professional schools are specialized institutions for those who have decided on a particular career direction, such as teaching, forestry or agriculture, to name a few. Ultimately and unfortunately, your family's or personal finances may determine the college you attend. If you're set upon entering a four-year school, consider the public-funded state schools, whose tuitions are much lower for state residents than are the tuitions of privately funded institutions. The average difference in price is $6,950 per year for universities; $4,730 for colleges.

You can cut the high cost of a college education by exploring the wonderful world of available scholarships and loan programs. I've been there. Write to the admissions or financial-aid department at each school you're considering, or call the Federal Student Aid Information Center in Rockville, Maryland, at 301-984-4070, to see if you are eligible for any federal government financial aid. In addition, talk with your high school guidance counselor or the college-admissions representatives from each school.

Many students try attending college part-time, or "stretching out" their education by alternating periods of work with semesters of college. Only 40 percent of college undergraduates actually attend full-time for all four years. I know a man in his midthirties who finally obtained his degree after fourteen years of attending college at night, taking just four credits per semester, because he had to work. So there are different routes you can take to the same destination.

Environment Matters (So No Farting!)

You are not going to spend your four years in college locked in your room studying, no matter how much you swear you will to your parents. College should be an all-around learning experience, including interaction with others (wink, wink) and the environment. If

the choice is between two schools that rate about equally academically, but one is in an urban area—and you hate city smog—while the other is in a tranquil country setting, it could mean the difference between your enjoying or not enjoying your college years.

Other considerations: Do you want to attend a local college and reside at home temporarily, to save money and make a more gradual transition to full independence? Or are you anxious for freedom—out of town, out of state or even overseas? And don't forget out of mind.

Once you narrow your choices to approximately a half-dozen, write to each college's admissions office for its catalog. If you can, visit the schools you're most interested in, because the touched-up photography in those catalogs can make the most disgusting campus look like the Garden of Eden. Walk around, talk to the animals—I mean, students—and ask yourself if you could be comfortable in this environment for two or four years.

There are a few books available that attempt to gauge a college's student body in terms of political and social attitudes, which are important things to know about if you're going to feel relaxed in your new home away from home. If you're a politically leftist-leaning liberal, then perhaps the University of California at Berkeley is more for you than the traditionally conservative, Mormon-run Brigham Young University in Salt Lake City.

With times having become so highly competitive, the goal of getting an education seems to have been overshadowed by a frantic desire to come out with a guaranteed career and a six-figure starting salary. With this set of values, the idea of college is that of a large cookie-cutter mold, punching out lawyers doctors and investment bankers from formless dough (that's you). Certainly you attend college to learn the skills for a career, but that shouldn't be your only reason.

Coda

You thought it was gone, But the fire goes on. And I thought you knew me. I told you before, Til I settle the score, That I'll never run free. I've had enough pain and anger in my brain To last many lifetimes. Yet still it grows, and the more that it shows, I won't have peace of mind. The fire still burns.

"The fire still burns," Twisted Sister

12. Teendom Isn't Terminal, It's Benign

Look at you! You're nothing! You're a big zero, and all you're ever going to be is a big zero!

—THE WORDS OF AN EX-GIRLFRIEND WHEN I WAS NINETEEN

Well, what do you know. The high school nerd, the big zero, became a success. The unpopular kid now has fan clubs all over the world. And better still, vindication. Years ago I said, "You're wrong, and I'll show you," to the ex-girlfriend, to the department store loading dock workers who teasingly called me "Rock Star" and to everyone who ever tried to keep me from pursuing my dreams. And I did.

The gold and platinum records are great. The money from songwriting and album-sales royalties is great. It's a relief after so many years of struggling to know that my family and I are secure. But you know what's best of all? That cover story on me in the *Newsday Sunday Magazine*, if for no other reason than when I was a teenager delivering the paper after school and on weekends, inserting those magazines into the Sunday paper drove me out of my mind. I knew that all my old classmates, teachers, friends, enemies, ex-co-workers, members of bands that used to play the clubs with Twisted Sister—and my ex-girlfriend—would see it.

It seemed to close a chapter of my life. No more having to prove myself to others. No more revenge. Now the only person I have to impress is me, which is a healthier attitude and just as inspiring.

So, you see, the way others see you at this young time in your life is by no means definitive or conclusive. Albert Einstein was told by a high school math teacher that he would never amount to anything and was encouraged to drop out. The famous inventor Thomas Edison was called a failure and a dunce. In my case, others were half-right and half-wrong about me. No, I wasn't a nobody, but yes, for a long time I was a weak individual, dependent on others for my identity. When I started to correct that flaw in my personality, I became a somebody. My attitude is, if I could do it, so can you. What you like about yourself, improve, and what you don't like so much, change.

You probably won't have to wait as long as I did for the big payoff, either. Even though it took me so many years to fulfill my ambitions, my self-improvement campaign started having its effect by the time I was seventeen. You'll find that as you near high school graduation, you begin to feel in control of your life for the first time, and it's exhilarating, as if you are a marionette cutting the strings connecting you to your puppeteer one by one. Look, your right leg moves on its own after all; so does your left leg. You begin to think more for yourself, express your opinions and become less concerned

with fitting in with the crowd. You're exposed to more areas in which to assert yourself, maybe discover a hidden talent.

As you become more mobile, your world begins to open. I know that for me learning how to drive was the most tangible (no, it's not a fruit) symbol of my newfound freedom. At the time it was like a key being handed to a jailed convict—a car key, to be exact. Those of you who live in the suburbs or rural areas will especially understand.

My first car was a used 1966 Ford Mustang convertible, with a high-performance 289-cubic-inch engine. It needed its radiator refilled nearly every ten miles, but I didn't mind at all; to me it was everything. It opened so many doors. I didn't really begin to date until I got a car because in the suburbs you either walk, which sucks, especially in the dead of winter, or have your parents drive you, which is considered pretty lame. My parents refused to drive me anywhere. One time I had a special date, and I was so desperate for transportation that I paid a friend of mine to chauffeur us. Not only was It lame, It was expensive.

Sitting in a car on a rainy day still brings back some of my fondest memories. Whenever it got too crazy in our house on stormy days—and with a brood of six, that was quite often—I used to run out to my car, drive down the block, park on a side street and read comic books. I'd always turn on the heat full blast That meant a lot, because in our house the heat was always kept low, and we had to dress warmly. Not in my car. The backseat was filled with garbage, just because no one could tell me to clean it up. My car, my garbage. My car stereo and my tapes. How loud did I want it? As loud as it'd go. I'd sit there for hours, and nobody could bug me.

High School Graduation

The last few months of twelfth grade are a very emotional time for many people, as they realize, "Wow, no more high school." It's as if for twelve years you've been climbing a steep mountain, and you've finally reached a ledge near the top. You look back down and breathe a sigh of relief. Phew! You made it this far. But then you realize that there are many more mountains ahead, each bigger than the last one. And you can't stand on this ledge forever.

It's one of the first times you feel some really adult emotions: the idea that you will never again see most of your classmates, some of whom you've known for all twelve years. Given today's highly mobile society, that's probably longer than most friendships you'll have during your entire life. They don't even have to be your friends, but they are part of this familiar environment. Even the school bully. Who knows what sort of bullies you'll meet in your new environment,

whether it be a job or college.

it can be pretty scary. But with your high school graduation comes a liberation that you've never experienced. For some, the first steps out into the "real world" bring with them a severe culture shock. Suddenly they are met by a radically different set of priorities and values. It's as if their world has been turned upside down.

All of a sudden being the football hero isn't going to help you get ahead in life, unless you're planning on making the sport your livelihood. Qualities such as intelligence, which is frequently the cause of teasing when you're a teenager, particularly for girls, get recognized by your new peers as the attributes they are. Those who never developed their personalities and talents but relied on their reputation as one of the popular kids often find themselves at a loss, with no direction.

You're free—to start over again or to continue on the path you've already forged for yourself. The choice is yours.

What Is Success? (And Why Is It Wearing My Clothes?)

The biggest success is to be a success at life, to be the best possible person you can be. Sounds a lot like an Army commercial, doesn't it? I've made a lot of personal strides over the years, but even today I'm still not always pleased with myself. I can be too self-centered and egocentric, and it's something I'm working on.

To many people success means having the right to do unto others the nasty things that were done unto them. "Now it's your turn." You see it all the time in the business world, or even on the level of high school fraternities and clubs, with painful and humiliating initiations. You get beaten on the butt with paddles, mortified, and as soon as you're welcomed into the club, you're ready to inflict the same pain and indignity on someone else.

I must admit, it's tempting sometimes. But I saw how stupid this was and decided I wasn't buying it. I've gone after my goal with a ferocious intensity, and sometimes I've had to make hard decisions that may have hurt someone else's feelings, but never unfairly or with malice. One of the most difficult things I've ever had to do was fire my best friend from one of my high school bands because his drumming just wasn't good enough. I learned then that sometimes doing the right thing isn't always the most pleasant. But I've never been a cutthroat in a business that's full of them.

Today I go out of my way to help young rock & roll bands avoid the pitfalls that tripped up Twisted Sister, and it's gratifying to help someone else. It's a competitive world out there, but if you can't look in the mirror and be pleased by the person you are—or at least be able

to say, "I'm trying to be a better human being"—it doesn't matter how much money, fame or power you have. How rich you are in ethics and morals is even more important, as well as the positive impact you have on others' lives.

You know who has embodied success to me? When I was a kid, there was a man on my block named Al Hoffman, a train conductor. Not a glamorous job; you never were likely to read about him in the newspapers or see him on television. But he always seemed to enjoy his work, he had a wife he loved, a couple of cars, including a classic Corvette, and a house. Nothing fancy; just like my family's, but decorated cool. When I was sixteen, I thought, Wow, man, Al has it all. I'm sure he would have found it amusing how this dorky kid from down the block looked up to him.

Despite all the differences I've had with him over the years, I regard my father as a success too. He raised six children, worked hard to keep a roof over our heads and food in our mouths and gradually improved his family's standard of living. He may not have an award to show for it, but he's the father of six decent human beings, and ultimately that means more than a gold record you hang on the wall. It's a different kind of success from what I have, but no less meaningful.

Would I be any less of a success as a person if I weren't a rock star? I hope not. I'd still be a loving husband and father, and if I didn't make it in music, I'd have sat my sights on some other goal and busted my hump to succeed at that.

As you become an adult, you will find there are points in your life where you have to accept the hard truth that certain fantastic ambitions you had as a child may not pan out—no, you're not going to be the first person to open a McDonald's on Saturn. That doesn't mean you give up all your goals; you just readjust your sights and keep moving forward. Maybe you'll be the second. But you have to learn to be satisfied with your progress along the way. I think that especially applies to teenagers, who spend a good deal of their youth anxiously awaiting adulthood. You will get there inevitably, so don't rush. Savor the good times you're experiencing now, and you'll be better able to appreciate the good times later. And if you're not having good times now, do something about it.

What Is an Adult? (And Why Do I Have to Be One?)

Being an adult means different things to different people. How's that for vague? Some draw their images of adulthood from TV: You get a pot belly and start smoking a pipe. Yech! Some believe that when you reach adulthood you let go of your dreams, that dreaming

and fun are for children only. How sad. An older man I know used to play drums in a swing orchestra back in the 1950s, had one of the first Corvettes to come off the production line, raced Harley-Davidson motorcycles and played tennis: an active, happening, cool dude. Then he got married. The next day he sold off his Harleys and his Corvette, stashed his drum kit in the closet and took up bricklaying. His reason was that his childhood had ended. He was now entering real life. It was time to be a man.

I'm an adult (aarghl) and a father, though I hardly look like your average dad. Being an adult doesn't mean abandoning your dreams, it means having the freedom to pursue them without having to answer to anybody but yourself. That's why I wrote the song 'Til Never Grow Up, Now," in response to people who wanted to know when I'd give up all this foolishness. Give it up? I was just getting started.

I'm still speeding toward my destination, still staying hungry. What? You think I've already reached my destination? No way. There's always more, and I'm going after it. So should you.

I've dug into my past for this book, which is something I generally don't like to do. I hope that some of my memories and thoughts will help you to better understand and deal with this confusing time of your life. Though times have changed a bit since I was a teenager, I think the basic problems of growing up remain the same. Kids are always going to suffer through identity crises, feel anxious over their futures and rebel against their parents.

I'm sure that in ten or fifteen years I'll have to face these same problems all over again, only this time as a parent. I can see it all now: me, with my graying, long hair, and my son arguing over which laser disks to play on the solar-powered multiphonic sound system. "Say, Jesse," I'll say, dusting off an ancient copy of *Stay Hungry*, "How about we listen to one of your old dad's records for a change? Ah, here's one I think you might enjoy, called '*We're Not Gonna Take It*.' You know, I wrote this for kids just about your age."

"Oh, Dad," Jesse will respond impatiently, tapping his foot, folding his arms in front of him and rolling his eyes, "do we have to listen to that heavy metal stuff? It's so loud, so—archaic. And those guitars that sound like buzz saws give me a headache. Besides, I have to get back to practicing Mozart's Piano Concerto in E flat, so would you mind turning that garbage down?"

"Garbage? That 'garbage' paid for that piano, young man."

Blah blah blah. 1 |

I fully expect my son to reject my values, just as I did my parents', and as much as I'm preparing myself for it, it's going to hurt. The day he no longer wants his mom to draw a fake tattoo on his arm so that he can "be like Daddy," I'm sure that I'll feel just as my father did

when his kids no longer wanted to hang out with him. "Can't, Dad, I'm busy."

And when I try to offer Jesse advice on how to talk to girls, or reassure him that all kids feel awkward at times, he'll probably just brush me off with a wave of his hand. "Like to talk now, Dad," he'll snap, "but I gotta go."

"Where?"

"Out."

Maybe while he's gone I'll slip a copy of this book under his door and paper-clip together the chapter on parents. Think he'll read it? Nah, no way, dude.

13. Help Yourself

When you're faced with problems, the biggest problem of all is that you usually feel alone in trying to solve them. You're not. Many organizations, agencies and hot lines specialize in aiding teenagers with everything from dealing with parental alcohol abuse, to obtaining contraception, to finding employment. In general, county and state government has finally become responsive to teenagers' unique needs, and there are an infinite number of services just a phone call away. Unfortunately, most teens are unaware of them.

We've listed alphabetically for you, by subject (Birth Control, College and so on), the names, addresses and phone numbers of national agencies, plus additional local sources of help, found easily through the White Pages and Yellow Pages phone books. Most of the national numbers are toll free (dial 1, 800, then the number), so a record of the call will not appear on your parents' telephone bill. With very few exceptions, which we note here, services for teens are confidential.

Learn how to use the phone books, which can be invaluable sources of information. Turn to the Community Services Numbers at the beginning of the White Pages to find phone numbers for reporting abusive parents, if you need help with a drug or alcohol problem or if you simply need someone to talk to. We refer you to these pages frequently.

Many counties have Youth Boards (also called Youth Services Divisions), which provide a wide array of programs and free services for teenagers, including pregnancy tests, prenatal care and job training and placement. Additional services are offered by way of the County and/or State Department of Social Services; phone numbers for both are at the back of the White Pages, in the County and State Government Offices listings.

If they are not absolutely free, these assistance programs are low cost or sliding scale—in other words, the charge is based on your ability to pay, which is probably minimal at best. These organizations recognize that most teenagers don't have much money of their own.

Call these numbers when you have questions or problems. Looking for help doesn't mean that there's something wrong with you, it means that you're mature enough to know when things need fixing. At the very worst you'll waste a few minutes on a local phone call, but it's quite possible that you will benefit greatly from the advice, aid and support of the people you'll reach. If they can't help you, they'll refer you to someone who can. Perhaps the greatest way in which they can assist you is just by being there; it's comforting to know that

somebody else cares.

Abortion

If you are contemplating having an abortion, contact immediately:

National Abortion Federation Hotline 800-772-9100; in Washington, D.C., 202-546-6090

The people at the NAF hotline can answer your questions about pregnancy and abortion procedures and refer you to one of over three hundred abortion clinics. The approximate cost of an abortion is between $200 and $350, depending on how early the pregnancy is terminated.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America 810 Seventh Avenue New York, N.Y. 10019 212-541-7800

The first question a Planned Parenthood counselor asks a pregnant teenager is, "Are you happy about being pregnant?" If the answer is yes, she is referred to prenatal care elsewhere. If she is undecided or unhappy, the abortion procedure is explained in detail. Planned Parenthood is confidential and emphasizes that its personnel do not pressure voting women into ending pregnancies but educate them about abortion and the available alternatives. You can locate the Planned Parenthood clinic nearest you by looking under "P" In the White Pages or by calling the headquarters number.

Other sources: In the Yellow Pages, "Birth Control Information Centers" and "Clinics." You can also be referred by your local Youth Board, the number of which is in the White Pages County Government Offices listings, or by a crisis-intervention hot line (look under "Crisis Intervention Service," Yellow Pages).

Abortion Alternatives

If an abortion is not the proper solution for you, contact:

Bethany Lifeline 800-238-4269

Refers teens to professional counseling services, adoption services, home care and some home placement for pregnant young women.

Birthright, Inc. 777 Coxwell Avenue Toronto, Ontario Canada M4C 3C6 800-848-LOVE 800-848-5683

Birthright, Inc., is a confidential twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week pregnancy-counseling service that encourages alternatives to abortion. Its more than six hundred chapters nationwide arrange for free pregnancy testing, free or low-cost medical care, maternity and baby clothes, transportation and, when available, free housing for girls who wish to leave home temporarily. Birthright also refers girls to

state-registered adoption or foster-care agencies, at their request. Its number is under "B" in the White Pages, or call the toll-free exchanges given here.

Other sources: In the Yellow Pages, "Birth Control Information Centers," "Clinics," "Human Services Organizations," "Adoption Services"; in the White Pages, look under "Social Services, Adoption" in the County Government Offices listings.

Abuse

If you an a victim of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect contact Immediately: your state's Child Abuse and Maltreatment Reporting Center; its toll-free number is located in the White Pages Community Services Numbers and in the Yellow Pages under "Health and Human Services." If you are in immediate physical danger, you can be placed temporarily in a shelter within twenty-four hours. Too uncomfortable or frightened to call? Have a neighbor or relative do so. You can also go to the police, your family doctor or a trusted teacher.

Alcoholism

If you have a drinking problem, contact:

Alcoholics Anonymous P.O. Box 459 Grand Central Station New York, N.Y. 10163, 212-686-1100

Alcoholics Anonymous is an informal society of nearly one and a half million recovering alcoholics in the United States, Canada and over one hundred countries. Men, women and teenagers with drinking problems meet in groups ranging from a handful of members to dozens, offering one another support and learning mutually how to combat alcohol abuse. Teenagers constitute 20 percent of AA's total membership, which is anonymous: You can go by your first name or no name at all. There is no membership fee.

Locate the AA fellowship nearest you by looking in the White Pages under "A," or by calling the headquarters number given here.

Other sources: In the Yellow Pages, look under "Alcoholism Information and Treatment Centers." For referrals to programs in your area, call the Youth Board, the number of which is in the White Pages County Government Offices listings.

Alcoholism, Parents'

If you're having trouble coping with a family member's drinking problem, contact:

Al-Anon and Alateen Family Group Headquarters, Inc. 1372 Broadway New York, N.Y. 10016, 212-302-7240

Al-Anon is a fellowship of adults and children who are affected by a family member's drinking; Alateen is exclusively for teenagers, who support one another and learn how to contend with the problem. All members are anonymous if they wish to be, and there is no membership fee.

Other sources: In the Yellow Pages, look under "Alcoholism Information and Treatment Centers" for the names of clinics specializing in family counseling; in the White Pages County Government Offices listings, under "Youth Board," for referrals.

Birth Control

If you have questions about or wish to obtain contraception, contact:

Planned Parenthood Federation of America 810 Seventh Avenue New York, N.Y. 10019 212-541-7800

Planned Parenthood clinics provide free, confidential, nonmoralizing contraceptive care. They will carefully explain the various forms of birth control and assist in selecting the one that is best for you. To locate the nearest Planned Parenthood clinic, look under "P" in the White Pages or call the number given here.

Other sources: In the Yellow Pages, under "Birth Control Information Centers"; in the White Pages, under "Youth Board" in the County Government Offices listings. Some county health departments offer free family-planning services ("Department of Health Information, County Government Offices," White Pages), and you may be eligible for free birth control through Medicaid, an assistance program for low-income people who are unable to pay for medical care. Medicaid's number is listed alphabetically in the White Pages.

Career Counseling

If you want to explore various career opportunities and/or take an aptitude test to help guide you toward a particular vocation: Look under "Career and Vocational Counseling" in the Yellow Pages for the names and phone numbers of the centers or individual counselors nearest you. These programs generally include interviews plus a battery of tests to try to determine the fields for which you are best suited. The average cost is approximately $250.

A valuable source of information is the Occupational Outlook Handbook, issued each year by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Not all but many libraries carry it, or you can order

the $23-hardcover or the $20-paperback from the U.S Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Other sources: Many county Youth Boards offer vocational counseling and even job placement. Their numbers are found in the White Pages County Government Offices listings.

College

If you want information on colleges, their programs, requirements and available scholarships, contact the individual institutions or:

National Association of College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) Suite 500 9933 Lawler Avenue Skokie, 111. 60077

NACAC sponsors National College Fairs throughout the country, at which representatives from approximately three hundred colleges and universities distribute literature and answer questions in one-on-one counseling sessions with you and your parents. Admission is free. You can write NACAC to find out when the fair nearest you is being held, or ask your guidance counselor.

Federal Student Aid Information Center: 301-984-4070

Call this number to learn whether you're eligible for federal government financial aid. Again, also consult your guidance counselor.

Counseling

If you feel immobilized by anxiety or overwhelmed by specific problems and need to talk to a mental health professional, contact: the following organizations, which can refer you confidentially to competent counselors, therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists in your area. Prices vary according to each counselor, but you should be able to find low-cost or sliding-scale assistance, and some counselors don't require your parents' knowledge or involvement. Explain your needs and situation to the personnel at these organizations, whose local numbers are listed alphabetically in the White Pages. If you can't find a chapter in your area, call their headquarters:

American Psychological Association 1200 Seventeenth Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036 202-955-7600

American Psychiatric Association 1400 K Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20005 202-682-6000

Family Service America 11700 West Lake Park Drive Park Place Milwaukee, Wise. 53224 414-359-2111

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) Suite 407 1717 K Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20006

202-429-1825

Other sources: In the White Pages County Government Offices listings, under "Youth Board"; in the Yellow Pages, under "Crisis Intervention Service."

If someone close to you has died, and you need to talk to someone: explain this to whomever you reach at the preceding organizations; they will try to put you in touch with a counselor specializing in bereavement.

Other sources: Members of the clergy (you don't have to belong to their church or synagogue), social service staffers or psychiatric nurses at local hospitals (look up their numbers in the Yellow Pages under "H"), and even some school guidance counselors are trained in such counseling.

Depression and Suicidal Feelings

If you feel anxious, depressed or suicidal, you need prompt help. Contact:

National Adolescent Suicide Hotline 800-621-4000

The trained volunteers at this and similar hot lines truly care about you and your problems. Not only can they dispense valuable advice, they're good listeners. They will discuss ways to resolve your troubles and put you in touch with others in your area who can help you.

Other sources: Most areas have crisis-intervention or suicide-prevention hot lines. You can find them in the White Pages Community Services Numbers or under "Crisis Intervention Service" in the Yellow Pages. In extreme crises, dial your local emergency number.

Drug Abuse

If you or a friend is suffering from a drug overdose, contact: Poison Control, without delay. The phone number is under "P" in the White Pages. You can also call the operator, the police, your local emergency number or the local crisis-intervention hot line, listed in the Yellow Pages.

If you've ingested pills or some other drug but are unsure what kind, Poison Control might be able to identify them and detail the necessary precautionary measures. They do not call the police, though in an emergency they will get you help. Important: If you are alone, unlock the front door before you call, so that should you lapse into unconsciousness, you'll be able to be rescued.

If you have a drug-abuse problem, contact:

National Drug Abuse Treatment Referral and Information Service 800-COC-AINE

A service of Fair Oaks Hospital in Summit, New Jersey, this hot line can answer your questions on drugs and their effects, and can provide referrals to treatment centers in your area.

Other sources: In the Yellow Pages, under "Drug Abuse and Addiction Information and Treatment," for the names of nearby drug-abuse rehabilitation centers; under "Crisis Intervention Service," for referrals. In the White Pages, under "Drug Abuse" in the Community Services Numbers, or "Youth Board," in the County Government Offices listings.

Eating Disorders

If you have an eating disorder—are excessively overweight, an obsessive dieter, anorexic or bulimic—contact:

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD) P.O. Box 7 Highland Park, 111. 60035 312-831-3438

Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc. (ANRED) P.O. Box 51021 Eugene, Ore. 97405 503-344-1144

ANAD and ANRED are national organizations that distribute eating-disorder information and referrals. If you need professional help, either you or your parents can call the preceding numbers to locate eating-disorder specialists in your area.

Other sources: Your family physician can identify eating disorders and recommend a program for you, or you can find local eating-disorder clinics and psychotherapists listed in the Yellow Pages under "Clinics" and "Psychologists," respectively. For additional information and referrals call one of the "Psychologist Information and Referral Services" numbers listed in the Yellow Pages.

Because food is not at the root of an eating disorder, clinics and specialists concentrate on identifying the unhappiness, depression or anxieties that led to the problem. Therapy may be held individually, with your entire family or in groups. Many but not all therapists will require your parents to arrange an appointment. Some self-help groups are free, low-cost or charge on a sliding scale.

Employment Opportunities

If you're interested in employment, contact: your local Youth Board, listed in the White Pages County Government Offices listings. Many counties and towns offer teenagers free part-time, full-time and summer-job placement, job-skills training and counseling.

High School Equivalency Diploma

If you want to take the General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency examination, contact:

American Council on Education

Suite 20 Dupont Circle Washington, D.C. 20036 202-939-9490

To learn of the GED testing center nearest you and the eligibility requirements for taking the exam, call the phone number given here.

Pregnancy Counseling

If you think you may be pregnant, contact immediately:

National Abortion Federation Hotline 800-772-9100; in Washington, D.C, 202-546-6090

This organization answers questions about pregnancy symptoms and can refer you to clinics that do free testing.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America 810 Seventh Avenue New York, N.Y. 10019 212-541-7800

To locate the Planned Parenthood facility nearest you, look under "P"

in the White Pages or call the number given here.

Birthright, Inc. 777 Coxwell Avenue Toronto, Ontario Canada m4c 3c6 800-848-love 800-848-5683

To locate the center nearest you, look under "B" in the White Pages

or call the toll-free numbers given here.

Other sources: You may be eligible for pregnancy testing through Medicaid, which you can reach by looking under "M" in the White Pages.

Pregnancy, Financial and Medical Aid

If you are pregnant and/or a teenage mother, you may be eligible for free or low-cost medical aid as well as financial aid. To find out, contact:

Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) This program is directed by your county's Department of Health, the number of which is in the White Pages County Government Offices listings. If you meet the requirements, you can receive checks with which to purchase selected high-nutrition foods for you and your baby at certain area stores.

Aid to Dependent Children (ADC; in some states, AFDC)

If you are eligible, through ADC you can receive cash assistance to feed yourself and your baby. The program is run by the State

Department of Social Services. Obtain the number by looking under "Department of Social Services" in the White Pages State Government Offices listings.

Other sources: Many county agencies sponsor free maternity services and, for after your baby is born, pediatric services. To learn about these programs, look under "Department of Health" in the White Pages County Government Offices listings. Or, through Medicaid, you and your baby may qualify for a number of medical services. Medicaid's phone number is found under "M" in the White Pages.

3Runaways

If you've left home or were thrown out by your parents, contact: Runaway Hotline 800-231-6946; in Texas, 800-392-3352 Home Run 800-MISS-YOU;in California, 800-HIT HOME National Runaway Switchboard 800-621-4000

All three hot lines operate twenty-four hours a day, can relay messages home for you without revealing your location and do not trace calls. They can see that you are fed and sheltered and receive medical help and counseling anywhere in the country. All are committed to keeping teenagers off the streets, and none tries to trick you into returning home. Home Run will arrange for transportation home if you desire.

Other sources: Many cities have their own runaway hot lines. You can locate them in the White Pages Community Services Numbers.

Sexuality

If you feel confused about your sexuality or have a sexual problem and need to consult a professional, contact:

Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists (ASECT) Suite 220 11 Dupont Circle, n.w. Washington, D.C 20036 202-402-1171

ASECT represents sex-education and -counseling professionals and can refer you to those in your area. Depending on state law, some therapists may require your parents to arrange an appointment for you.

If you have questions about homosexuality, contact:

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) 1517 U Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20009 202-332-6483

Crisisline: 800-221-7044; in Alaska, Hawaii and New York, 202-529-1604, 3-9 p.m., Eastern standard time

NGLTF can help you if you're feeling confused about your sexuality and want someone to talk to, or if you need information on sexually transmitted diseases or homosexual rights.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

If you fear you have a sexually transmitted disease, contact: VD Hotline 800-227-8922; in California, 800-982-5883

This hot line can answer questions about venereal disease and refer you to treatment centers in your area.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America 810 Seventh Avenue New York, N.Y. 10019 212-541-7800

Planned Parenthood clinics diagnose, counsel and treat STD sufferers. To find the one nearest you, look under "P" in the White Pages or call the number given here.

National Gay/Lesbian Crisisline

800-221-7044; in Alaska, Hawaii and New York, 202-529-1604, 3-9 p.m., Eastern standard time

Staffers can answer your questions about acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), recommend preventive measures and provide referrals to treatment centers.

Other sources: Your county Department of Health may offer venereal disease treatment. Its number is in the White Pages County Government Offices listings.

About the Authors

Dee Snider is lead singer and songwriter for the internationally popular rock & roll group Twisted Sister. In addition he is host of the MTV cable video program "Heavy Metal Mania," is a record producer, is writing a screenplay—and is now an author. He survived his teenagerhood quite well, thank you, and resides with his wife, Suzette, and son, Jesse, in a typical rock-star-spread-with-swimming-pool on Long Island, New York.

Philip Bashe is the author of Dolphin/Doubleday's Heavy Metal Thunder, coauthor of the Rolling Stone Rock Almanac, former editor of International Musician and Recording World, Circus, Good Times and Foxtrot magazines, and writer for the Buffalo Evening News as well as several national publications. In addition, he is an ex-radio and TV announcer.

Bashe lives with his wife in Baldwin, New York, hometown of Dee Snider (!).